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The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia

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National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka
2001

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INTRODUCTION:

MYTHS, SYMBOLS AND POLITICS

For decades, Western Sovietologists developed their concept that emphasized confrontation between Russians and non-Russians as the core collision in the Soviet political model. From this perspective, the relationships between the political center and the dependent periphery looked very simple: the center did its best to implement Russification, which was strongly resisted by the periphery, where the development of the local languages and cultures, instead, were promoted. It was argued that Russification was used to legitimize the political dominance of the Russian majority, whereas the maintenance of local languages and cultures were the basis of resistance to this pressure (Barghoorn 1956; Tillet 1969).

It seems that this analysis was rooted in the model of the British colonial empire, which was extensively exploited for interpreting the interplay of political forces in the USSR. However, by depicting everything in black and white, the advocates of this approach failed to acknowledge the much more complicated pattern of ethno-political relationships and tensions that were the core of Soviet reality. This pattern ultimately served the catalyst for bloody ethnic conflicts, which destroyed the impressive, albeit far removed from reality, myth of the “peoples’ friendship” persistently advocated in Soviet propaganda. Heavy emphasis on “Russification” as the essence of the Soviet drama poorly equipped Western Sovietologists to make an analysis of the ethnic conflicts. Also poorly prepared were their Soviet counterparts, who lulled themselves with lip service to the “everlasting and indissoluble friendship” of the Soviet peoples.

The most thoughtful of the Western experts on Soviet affairs have long been aware that, despite the would-be uniform and persistent Communist dogma, several times internal policy changed radically in the USSR. This was particularly true in connection with the nationality issue (Simon 1991). Yet, despite all these changes, there was one point of policy that was surprisingly persistent; namely, continuous struggle by the official ideology against nationalism. This was as hot an issue in the 1970s – 1980s as it was at the dawn of Soviet power. True, during various periods nationalism was understood in different terms, and the attitudes of the authorities concerning various kinds of nationalism were different. Yet, the politicization of ethnicity implemented by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s and the promotion of hierarchical ethno-political administrative arrangements in the USSR made ethnic nationalism a permanent factor of internal politics, at all its various levels. For example, whereas certain non-Russian republics made every effort to withstand Russification in 1958 and 1978, certain ethnic minorities within their borders waged heavy struggles for survival against local republican authorities, whose policy was aimed at their assimilation. The struggle was waged for access to higher positions of power, priority in exploitation of the local natural resources, prime access to state financial support, the right to education in one’s native language, the maintenance of folk culture, and the like.

The view of local history played an important role in this discourse, since it would have to legitimize the rights of both the dominant majority and the ethnic

minority to claim their privileges. According to Soviet ideological dogma, these privileges could be only granted to authentic indigenous ethnic groups. Therefore, the concept of authenticity was of crucial political importance, to the extent that it made them artificially conserve and retain those folk traditions, which, under different conditions, would have failed to survive in the industrial and post-industrial environment. For the same reason, the primordialist approach enjoyed great respect within Soviet ideology. Thus, a prestigious past was unanimously valued as a highly desirable support for arguments, which might facilitate a successful struggle for desirable privileges.

I share the idea that, within contemporary trends towards secularization, religion is replaced by a sacred past (a myth of origins), which comes to be an important basis of ethnic identity and is used extensively to legitimize ethnic political, economic, social and cultural claims (Smart 1987: 71; Baram 1991; Verdery 1991; Smith 1991: 161-164. Cf. Gellner 1983: 56-57; Giner 1993). Indeed, "... history is not a product of the past but a response to requirements of the present" (Eriksen 1993: 72). To paraphrase Peter Worsley (1984: 249), one can argue that the past is "not absolute or simply intellectual category, but is invoked to provide identities, which legitimize claims to rights". In fact, people construct the past, first, with reference to both the contemporary socio-political landscape and the interests and values embedded in it (Fogelson 1989: 139), and second, in order to develop projects for the future that are based on the respectively interpreted or reinterpreted past¹).

More than ten years ago, British anthropologists put forward the intriguing question: "How does the present make up the past?" (Chapman, McDonald, Tonkin 1989: 4-5). Since then, the views of the function of the past have changed considerably. Nowadays, many anthropologists would subscribe to the idea that "history ... is a representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the present" (Friedman 1992: 195). It is also well established that the views of the past greatly affect people's behavior in the present. "What we believe about the past, and the truth or falsity of that belief, does much to define how we behave in the present, and what we attempt to do in securing our future," is how this was formulated by the well-known American archaeologist, C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996: 8). To put it differently, "Ethnicity will not allow us to separate the tranquility of thought from the upheavals of action." This was the thoughtful judgment of British anthropologists (Chapman, McDonald, Tonkin 1989: 2. Also see Laitin 1998: 21-22).

While being aware of these issues, any contemporary state, especially, a nation-state, highly appreciates the importance of an official view of history and imposes it upon the general public by all possible means – through the mass media, the educational system, museums, advertisements, and political rhetoric. A national state usually usurps the right of stating the "historical truth", appropriates the past within its territorial borders, makes a thorough selection of historical facts while exaggerating and glorifying what provides it benefits and downplaying or

neglecting those points that might cause it ideological damage (Alonso 1988: 39-45).

While studying contemporary ethno-nationalist ideologies and their bearers, one has to consider the high educational level of the latter, who obtained their knowledge of the past at school, from belles-lettres and through the mass media (Ferro 1992; Smart 1987: 70-71; Eriksen 1993: 91-92; Ruiz-Zapatero, Alvarez-Sanchis 1995). All this sort of information comes from professionals – historians, ethnologists, archaeologists, linguists, writers and the like. Moreover, one has to distinguish between two groups of such professionals: those from the dominant majority (the titular nation), and others belonging to ethnic minorities. Depending on the interplaying dimensions (the political environment, the nature of ethnic relationships, demographic trends, the social milieu, etc.), these intellectuals put forward certain ethnocentric versions of the past which represent and evaluate the same events or processes of the past quite differently. A clash of competing ethnocentric views of the past is a common result of this activity (McNeill 1986: 9; Shnirelman 1996b, 1996c, 1998a; Tishkov 1997: 8-15; Guboglo 1998: 563-577), which contributes into what I call an ideology of ethnic confrontation (Shnirelman 1995b). If the situation under a totalitarian regime is examined, one has to consider the pressure of the official ideology – the censorship and suppression of micro-ideologies or “deviant ideologies” which went far beyond the official paradigm. Therefore, an examination of the political manipulation of scholars and their views during the Soviet era is an important aspect of my studies.

The realities of the 20th century have undermined the basis of a positivist approach to historiography. It turned out that improvements of methodological procedure per se proved to be unable to overcome ethnocentric evaluation and interpretation of historical evidence. Experts in historical methodology have long realized that “historical truth” is constructed by historians in different ways depending on their starting points, which are determined mostly by political, social, religious, cultural, national and other non-scholarly factors, rather than by purely methodological requirements. Having pointed that out, one of the most prominent contemporary Russian historians, Aron Ya. Gurevich (1991: 31) remarked reasonably enough that social memory is “a creative process rather than a store of facts”. Thus, a view of the past proves to be a function of a contemporary position of an ethnic group, of its worldview and its expectations for the future (Thomson 1968: 27). Political, economic, demographic and other shifts which change the position of a given ethnic group within a more inclusive socio-political system, re-arrangement of political alliances, shifts in evaluation of the surrounding environment and in self-evaluation – all of these factors have a direct effect on the image of the outside world constructed and cultivated by an ethnic group. By building up its peculiar view of the past, an ethnic group selects facts or pseudo-facts which help it to develop self-esteem, reserve a desirable place for itself in the international community and provide access to valuable resources, be they a real political position or symbolic prestige. That is why, if there is any objectivity in our

communications with the past, it is in the process of constant changes that make us correct evaluations of what happened in history or radically reconsider it. It is this process of re-interpretation of the past that composes the basis of my present work, where the products of this process are viewed as “new myths”, after Eric Hobsbawm (1983). Furthermore, I argue that the ethnocentric views of the past being disseminated by schools, the mass media and in belles-lettres contribute greatly to contemporary ethnic identity and promote certain models of human political behavior. Thus, an image of the past is the main character of my present work.

It is no wonder that historians are highly involved in this activity, demonstrating willingness to meet the demands of their own society or ethnic group. For the aforementioned reasons, this was especially characteristic of the ethnically non-Russian historians in the former USSR, who felt that they were obliged to develop those views of the past that might help to upgrade the prestige of their own republics or ethnic groups. Therefore, nationalism, or, more precisely ethnic nationalism, was always, explicitly or implicitly, embedded into those general views of regional histories advocated by the local historians, who worked in various republics of the USSR. Moreover, these ethnocentric views of the past had a great effect on their respective ethnic groups, while stirring up ethnic self-awareness and shaping identity. As is well established, an ethnocentric worldview promotes group hostility, and “unfavorable perceptions are transmitted by way of myths and legends about the out-group” (Stagner 1987: 9, 11). It is a surprise that while they manifest great interest in the hot issues of nationalism and ethnic identity in their own countries and thoroughly examine language policies, religion, ethnic cultures and related issues, contemporary analysts (historians, sociologists, ethnologists) in the post-Soviet states, with but a few exceptions (Shnirelman 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Tishkov 1997: 8-15; Guboglo 1998: 563-577; Eimermaher, Bordiugov 1999), neglect distinct national or ethnic views of the past and their political impacts, both in the USSR and in post-Soviet states.

If it is true that an historian experiences great pressure, not only from the academic community, but no less from the external socio-political milieu, then this is twice as true of ethnic historians. Indeed they, as well as their co-nationals, were very sensitive about all the injustices of national policy aimed at them, and did their best to mobilize historical arguments in order to demonstrate the harmful and groundless nature of this policy. True, it would be incorrect to argue that all local historians developed ethnocentric concepts of the past quite consciously and with equal enthusiasm. Some of them did so involuntarily, after being much pressed by both local authorities and public opinion.

Therefore, any value free specialist, who is interested in local history and refers extensively to the concepts of local historians, has to be aware of the socio-political environment in which the latter worked. In fact, one must employ the externalist approach that is used successfully to assess the history of the Soviet science, for example, by Loren Graham (1998). Attention should first be paid to the

public attitudes and beliefs that might affect these local historians, and second to pressure from the local party and Soviet authorities. Indeed, a historian as a "fighter on the ideological front" had to be a Communist party member, and only a few managed to avoid membership at the expense of their careers. Attention is cast third upon those no less ethnocentric versions of the regional past that were developed by their counterparts in the neighboring republics or among competing ethnic groups²).

In the non-Russian republics, where all the ethnic injustices were perceived very painfully, historians had to deal permanently with attitudes of the general public, which reached them through the kin network, the mass media and belles-lettres, and especially through their colleagues. The latter's attitudes, which were expressed in informal talks, have to be considered among the most powerful means of external pressure. It is at this level that ethnocentric views of the past were openly and sharply discussed.

At the same time, a fairly effective system of control over the production of historical writings was developed in the USSR. It was not based so much on formal censorship as on self-censorship and pressure from colleagues, and it worked at various levels. Any manuscript had to be formally reviewed and discussed within the respective research department, and then at a meeting of the Scientific Council of the Research Institute or University. In the latter case, the opinions of the directorship and the local Party bosses were the most respected of all. If a manuscript was accepted at all these levels, it was the turn of an editor of a publishing house, who thoroughly examined the manuscript, mostly for its political rather than for any academic errors.

Indeed, one should not expect pressure at all these levels and in all social contexts to be uni-directional. For example, ethnocentrism could dominate at the informal level, whereas the official authorities called for struggle against it. Yet, as ethnic nationalism was a very important factor for the legitimization of the local authorities' power in the eyes of the native population, they, however paradoxically, were persistently sympathetic to it, even when they had to launch ideological campaigns against it because of being pressed from Moscow. Moreover, as we shall see later on, these campaigns, which from time to time disturbed particular republics, were skillfully directed by the local authorities, mainly against ethnic minorities that were condemned as the bearers of the "harmful nationalist ideas". In this environment, the nationalism of the dominant nation not only avoided receiving any damage, but it even consolidated its position. For example, local historians satisfied themselves with the great social importance of ethnocentric views of the past, which were declared "patriotic". They themselves, partly sincerely and partly for the sake of their careers, rushed to articulate this sort of patriotism. This was possible because of the obscurity of much of the historical evidence and the vague knowledge of some historical periods, permitting various interpretations and re-interpretations. Indeed, any historian is aware of quite controversial situations when, due to the fragmentary and inconsistent nature of the historical evidence, it is possible to develop various, sometimes even opposite, interpretations. It was in

these cases that an historian with a patriotic orientation would choose those that were in accordance with his or her patriotic beliefs, satisfied social memory or met the demands of the power structure. That is why history is fated to be nationalist during the epoch of nation-states (Thomson 1968).

Certain specific factors worked in Transcaucasia as well, which greatly affected local historians and their scholarly production. For the Armenians, the main concerns were focused, first, on the extensive Armenian Diaspora beyond the borders of the Armenian SSR and, secondly, on the memory of the genocide of 1915; the Azeri scholars did not forget the large Azeri-speaking enclave in Iranian territory; and the Georgians were most alarmed by the multi-ethnic composition of their republic. We shall see further on to what a major extent all these contemporary issues were reflected by the versions of local history developed in all the Transcaucasian republics.

All of this comes to be an especially sensitive issue when one deals with the problem of the origins of a people, or ethnogenesis, which proves to be a very difficult issue for both methodological and documentary reasons. Indeed, from the perspective of methodology, a lot depends on what is meant by the term "a people" (ethnos, ethnîe) and how one can judge of their consolidation. In different time different researchers and whole schools of thought based their conclusions on either a language, or culture, or religion, or even race, or referred to all or several of these traits (Alekseev 1986, 1989). Yet, leaving aside the possibility of different interpretations of all these dimensions, the great bulk of contemporary scholars agree that ethnicity should be defined through self-awareness rather than through enumerated, so-called "objective", traits. The latter might be interesting not in themselves but through the meanings imposed upon them by people. However, it is very difficult if not impossible to study this issue with the very scarce, fragmentary and obscure evidence at hand that has survived from the distant past. This is the main documentary obstacle that often makes judging an ethnic pattern in earlier times a hopeless task.

As we shall see further on, the idea that the Armenians alone made up the population of the Arsacid kingdom turned out to be a common one in Armenian publications. Usually Armenian scholars refer to Strabo, who related that all the inhabitants of the Armenian state spoke Armenian by the end of the First Millennium B.C. The reliability of Strabo's opinion is beyond discussion in Armenian historiography. Yet Strabo carried out no special extensive linguistic survey of the Armenian plateau. Of course, this is in no way to be expected of a classical writer. All the same, it is well known that Near-Eastern cities in those days enjoyed the presence of Syrian and Jewish communities, and there is no reason to assume that Armenia was an exception to that. Indeed, how otherwise could the Aramaic script have been brought to Transcaucasia at that time?

Historians are also aware that in the remote past the language of bureaucracy and literacy could be different from that of commoners. To give but a few examples, Sumerian cuneiform was maintained in the Old Babylon kingdom and

the local bureaucracy continued cultivating the Sumerian language, despite the fact that an Akkadian (East Semitic) language dominated among the local population. The most popular written language in the Hellenistic states of the Near East was Greek although both the elite and the majority of the local population belonged to different cultural traditions. Simultaneously, Aramaic was the international lingua franca of the Iranian world. The same phenomenon was observed in medieval Europe, where Latin dominated as the language of literacy. Even quite recently, at the turn of the 19th century, the Russian elite used to speak and write in French. There are many cases of this sort; all of them deal with the core issue, which confuses professional historians. Indeed, if one deals with a less-known early state, from which only very scarce and fragmentary documents survive, is it possible to refer to these documents as evidence of the linguistic affiliation of the local population, or should one talk about the possibility of a special language used by the bureaucracy and different from that of the natives? Historians might give various answers to this question, but it is not difficult to predict the response of the patriotically motivated scholar. If the language used in the written documents is closely related to his own, he would consider it to be the language of the natives; otherwise, he will identify this language with the narrow circle of an alien bureaucracy and oppose it to that of the local population. Moreover, it is easy to imagine that, in the latter case, he or she would attempt to represent the heroic struggle of the indigenous inhabitants against the “foreign oppressors”.

One more problem concerns a celebration of famous dates, which are considered very important by indigenous people and promoted by local authorities. We shall see later on that the discovery of an early inscription proving the erection of an Urartian fortress, Erebuni, in the area of contemporary Yerevan in 782 B.C., and made by archaeologists in 1950, was an excuse for the Armenian authorities to celebrate the 2750th anniversary of Yerevan in 1968. At the same time, there was no direct relationship between the archaeological discovery and this celebration. Indeed, a magnificent national festival was organized, not by the archaeologists, but by the republican bureaucracy, who spent a lot of money on it. Why did the local authorities become so interested in this particular date? Why did they not arrange a celebration soon after the discovery – say, in 1953 or 1958 – when it would have been possible to celebrate respectively the 2735th or 2740th jubilees? Why did they not delay this festival until some later time – say, until 2018 – in order to celebrate the 2800th anniversary of the city? Then again, what does the Armenian capital Yerevan have to do with an Urartian fortress, whose connections with the Armenians are still obscure? Yet, an answer to all these questions is not an enigma to those, who are familiar with the recent history of Armenia. It is rooted in the events of 1965 that, as will be demonstrated further on, greatly affected the republic and gave a strong push to contemporary Armenian nationalism. In turn, ethnocentric views of the past were very much inspired in Georgia by the events of 1956, 1978 and 1988-89 that will be analyzed later on. Being very sensitive points for the local populations, all these events promoted a formation of patriotic, i.e.

ethnocentric, views of the past among the local historians.

True, there were also historians who tried to avoid sacrificing historical methodology for the sake of patriotism. In this case, they had to withstand an exhausting struggle at all the levels of censorship that have already been mentioned. Some of them were unable to do that and surrendered. Others were strong enough to wage a long struggle and sometimes even won a victory. However, the price of victory was very high – one had to compromise with an editor in order to publish a volume, which sometimes was the result of studies carried out over decades. As a result, the final product became full of contradictions and inconsistencies, which permitted the author's followers to develop and advocate opposite concepts. This is what occurred in the case of a seminal book by the Academician G. A. Melikishvili (1959) concentrating on the history of early Georgia.

At the same time, while communicating with colleagues or addressing them in scholarly publications, professional historians used to follow certain methodological principles and avoided going far beyond a framework of plausible hypotheses. Yet, they experienced more freedom in the pages of popular publications and in the mass media in general. This became especially obvious in the late 1980s, when many scholarly disputes over historical issues flooded the local media and, overtaken by emotion, certain historians sacrificed professional principle for the sake of patriotism. Amateur authors (journalists, writers, and intellectuals in general, who were far from the field of history) felt themselves even less restricted by any professional ethics. They, being free of the pressure of rigid scholarly censorship, let themselves develop highly dubious historical constructions, implausible to professional historians (Altstadt 1991). Through their interpretation views about the remote past reached the general public, via the media, science fiction and belles-lettres. In these sorts of publications, the historical process was not only highly simplified but also provided with a patriotic flavor.

School proves to be an especially important source of historical knowledge for the general public. Schools were obliged to turn out nation-oriented citizens, rather than to merely fascinate pupils with what had happened in the past. As we shall see, a "patriotic", i.e. nationalist, approach dominated the republican textbooks of local history, and the role of "aliens" in the regional historical process was played down or neglected altogether. The Georgian and Azeri attitudes concerning the enlightening activities of the great early medieval Armenian cultural activist, St. Mesrob Mashtots, was an obvious case in point. At the same time, while being willing to meet the nationalist demands of their co-nationals, professional historians still avoided producing ultra-patriotic textbooks. Amateur authors enthusiastically fulfilled this task, and, under growing ethnic tensions, the general public appreciated their historical constructions, to the extent that they proved to be more popular than any scholarly productions. It is no accident that in the very late 1980s – early 1990s many school textbooks were published by amateur authors.

Thus, the problem is not that, having to deal with scarce and contradictory historical evidence, an historian has to make a choice in favor of any particular

interpretation. In my view, it is much more important to examine why, voluntarily or under some pressure from outside, an historian chooses the very interpretation that meets the demands of a nationalist concept best of all. It is of no less interest to determine what this interpretation is about, in what ways it satisfies the nationalistic demand, how it contributes to the shaping of an identity. Moreover, in this book I am not so interested in the opinions of professional historians, as reflected in their scholarly production, but rather in what particular images of the past were chosen, how they were consumed by the general public, how they affected the ethnic identity and ethnic political orientation in general, who, in what way and in what environment constructed these images, to what extent they were promoted or resisted by local authorities, why the latter eagerly welcomed certain interpretations of the past and which ones in particular. That is why, in my analysis, I would not like to restrict myself to an examination or a criticism of historical concepts; this criticism is of less interest to me. The present volume is focused on the image of the remote past that is represented not only by professionals but also by the amateur authors, and not only in scholarly publications but also in the mass media and especially in school textbooks, as well. I also pay attention to which images of the remote past are depicted by those specialists (historians of the recent past, geographers, art specialists, etc.), who refer to those images in brief in their more general surveys that focus on much later epochs. I view these works as very instructive, for – while presenting a short overview of the distant past – their authors have to address those key points, which, in their view, are of crucial importance to their own ethnic group. These very points make up the core of contemporary myths of the remote past and affect ethnic identities.

I also heavily emphasize the comparative analysis of concepts of the past that were developed by neighboring national historical schools in the same region and, as we shall see, were closely connected to the attitudes of the local politicians. I believe that it is impossible to understand many ideological constructions embedded into the local myths of the past if one is unaware of competing myths built up by ethnic neighbors. We shall see, further on, how sensitive were the reactions of Armenian and Azeri, or Georgian and Abkhazian views of ethnogenesis to each other's constructions. Finally, I am mostly interested in those key historical periods when history undergoes radical revision, and I consider it very important to analyze the nature of such crucial periods. Why is there a demand for a revision of the image of the past, and how does the socio-political environment affect the construction of new images of the distant past? While carrying out this sort of analysis, I am focusing chiefly on ethnic aspects of the remote past, which prove to be especially sensitive nowadays and are closely related to the ideology of ethnic conflicts. I share an approach elaborated by Verena Stolcke (1995: 22), who argued that: "... it is not cultural diversity per se that should interest anthropologists but the political meanings with which specific political contexts and relationships endow cultural differences. People become culturally entrenched and exclusive in contexts where there is domination and conflict".

All the problems in question proved to be a battleground for Soviet historians engaged by the Soviet Academy of Sciences on projects focusing on the development of regional histories. In April 1976, a Co-ordination Meeting held by the Historical Division of the USSR Academy of Sciences made a decision to carry out a five-year (1976-1980) project, focusing on regional histories of the peoples of the USSR (Pol'skii 1976; Voronov 1989a). In October 1976, the Soviet historians met in Sukhumi (the capital of the Abkhazian ASSR) in order to discuss the project of an all-embracing "History of Transcaucasia". Yet, the high hopes of the project's initiators clashed with real life, which did not provide much cause for optimism. Despite all the attempts of the Moscow and Leningrad scholars to suggest compromise solutions, the meeting reached a deadlock. It turned out that there were at least three different views of the Transcaucasian past (the Azeri, Armenian and Georgian ones) which opposed each other in many respects.

This was not the first time that historians discussed how to develop a common history of Transcaucasia. They had gone into this previously at the Joint Conference of the Academies of Sciences of all three Transcaucasian Republics, held in Baku from March 29 to April 2, 1954. It is instructive that in his lecture on historical period setting, the well-known Armenian scholar, S. T. Yeremian, did his best to avoid discussing the hottest issues concerning the formation of distinct Transcaucasian ethnic groups (Yeremian 1957). Apparently, he was aware of the sensitivity of all sorts of problems and was unwilling to provoke an explosive dispute. At the same time, many participants in the conference considered it useful to co-ordinate studies of related historical issues and to keep meeting at similar conferences in the future. Yet, a joint "History of Transcaucasia" has never been completed.

The issue was discussed for the last time in 1988, at a meeting of the Historical Division of the USSR Academy of Sciences. It was preceded by a highly emotional discussion of national problems that was initiated by the highest Soviet authorities. In this environment, it became impossible to silence any longer the disputes between various national historical schools, and the Academician-secretary of the Historical Division of the USSR Academy of Sciences, S. L. Tikhvinsky, came to recognize that these disputes destroy academic knowledge and cause interethnic conflicts (Tikhvinsky 1986: 10-12). He was supported at the 1988 Meeting, where senior scholars from all the Transcaucasian republics spoke against the modernization and politicization of history, albeit tending to accuse their counterparts in neighboring republics, rather than themselves or their own colleagues. Yet, nobody dared discuss the true causes of the politicization of historical knowledge. Instead, there were once again appeals for a search for the exclusive truth. As in 1976, a new program of multi-disciplinary studies was worked out, aiming to develop joint projects involving scholars from the neighboring republics. Ethnogenetic studies had a very important role to play in that endeavor. At the same time, only ethnogeneses of the Armenians, Azeris and Georgians were on the agenda; other ethnic groups, who lived in Transcaucasia,

were not even mentioned in the program (Areshian, Abramian 1988). Soviet scholarship was not able to get out of the closed circle of the primordialist approach.

At the same time, since the very late 1980s, voices of alarm were heard from all the republics, warning of a threatening politicization of early and medieval history, and of a destructive ideological charge by the highly ethnocentric views of ethnogenesis. Yet, more often than not attention was paid to historical construction by the opposite side, which was treated as distortion of the historical truth. The latter was associated with a view developed by the compatriot scholars. Be this as it may, there were warnings of stirrings of hostility and hatred towards neighboring ethnic groups, closely associated with appeals for political separatism (Nadareishvili 1996: 5, 33-34), or with forcing an ethnic minority out of its territory (Oganjanian 1989). Only very rarely was criticism aimed at one's own compatriots, who advocated implausible ideas, that they were being driven by "falsely taken patriotism" (Aliev 1988a).

Meanwhile, the age of nationalism produced special reasons that caused scholars, voluntarily or not, to occupy themselves with modernization of the past. Nowadays, many people believe that contemporary factors of ethnic identity are everlasting and universal. Actually, this provides grounds for the primordialist approach. Yet, even nowadays an identity is built of various resources in various countries and in different ethno-political environments. Sometimes it is based on religion (as in the former Yugoslavia and in contemporary Iran), in some cases on race (an instructive case is that of the Blacks in the United States), and very often on language. The latter basis predominated in the USSR and is still common in post-Soviet states. However, only a few people were aware that even in the Soviet Union language was by no means a universal factor in identity. For example, the Ajars and Meskhetian Turks distinguished themselves from the Georgians by loyalty to Islam; the same situation obtained for the Kriashens (Orthodox Christian Tatars) who, despite their Tatar language, also isolated themselves from the Volga River Tatars for religious reasons. At the same time, the ethnic majority hardly appreciated this position; the Georgians still include the Ajars in their own entity, and the Volga River Tatars never opposed themselves to the Kriashens. All of this manifested more than simply a willingness to maintain ethnic ties. The problem went much deeper, for in the Soviet environment the republics were built up on an ethnic basis, and ethnic identity was closely related to political and territorial issues. Indeed, only titled people enjoyed full rights and felt comfortable about their autonomy within a particular territory. That is why everything mattered for them, especially the size of their population and their ability to incorporate related ethnic groups or to impose the idea of a common origin even upon those ethnic minorities, who were in fact of different origin.

Moreover, claims of a territory and political domination had to be confirmed by history, in this environment. This was the explanation for the actually insatiable interest in the ethnogenesis of one's own people, the origins of one's most ancient

ancestors, which characterized Soviet historical discipline, no matter in what Soviet republic it was developing. Those involved in this struggle for their remote ancestors did not appreciate at all the idea that an identity could be shaped somewhat differently in the past than it is shaped nowadays. Dead people were denied their right for any different identity than that provided for them by modern ideologists. Hence an endless and hopeless struggle between different national historical schools over political and cultural activists of the medieval past (Panarin 1994: 36) as well as over whole tribal or ethnic groups in the remote past, whose names were scarcely mentioned in historical documents.

For example, an autonomous Albanian Church was active in Artsakh (Nagorny Karabagh) until the beginning of the 19th century. Under a tradition of religious identity common in the medieval past, the parishioners of the Church called themselves the “Albanians”, despite their Armenian language, culture and ethnic attitudes (Mnatsakanian 1969: 172-174; Yuzbashian 1989: 85). Their Armenian identity seems natural to contemporary Armenian scholars. Quite the opposite, as we shall see further on, the Azeris question this identity and consider the Caucasian Albanians their own ancestors.

In a similar way, in order to gain commercial privileges and to be enrolled in a craft guild medieval Georgians used to convert to monophysitism (an Armeno-Gregorian form of Christianity) and to identify themselves with the Armenians. However, contemporary Georgian scholars can hardly reconcile themselves with this, and continue to consider these people Georgians. For example, they argue that the Armenian inscriptions in the territory of early Georgia could only have been left by “Georgian monophysites” (Gvasalia 1991a: 163-164). On their side, Armenian authors maintain that these inscriptions might have been made by “Armenian diophysites” (for example, see Muradian 1968, 1985: 32-37). At the same time, the undoubted participation of Armenian builders in the construction of the famous Mtskheta Dzhvari church (Muradian 1985: 33-34) is put into question and even considered insulting by Georgian authors, as an “attempt to prove the Armenian origin of a masterpiece of Old Georgian architecture” (for example, see Muskhelishvili, Arveladze 1988: 151).

All of this gives non-scientific bases for a priori reasoning resting upon the self-serving use of scarce and arbitrary historical documents for manipulations of the remote past – an approach which is quite common among various sorts of nationalists. An especially favorable environment for that sort of thing was present in the Soviet Union where, during the decades of their monopoly of rule, the Soviet bureaucracy accumulated extraordinary experience in manipulating public opinion. For example, an important role in the escalation of both the Georgian-Abkhazian and the Nagorny Karabagh conflicts was played by the decisions of, respectively, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia (CC CPG) in 1978 and the Nagorno-Karabagh Regional Branch of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in 1975, which introduced more severe censorship of local fiction and historical writing. In particular, the local Communist authorities based those decisions on

their appropriated right to the “historical truth” and tried to affect public opinion with the help both of views of early and medieval history, and belles-lettres (for that, see Mirzoian 1989; Marykhuba 1994a: 284, 291-292).

In this book, I shall analyze the development of Armenian, Azeri, Georgian, Abkhazian and South-Ossetian historical writing, which had long cultivated different views of their regional past (map 1). The differences concerned the most crucial points, which not only touched upon sensitive aspects of local identities but also aimed at contested territories. As we shall see, interpretations of the early histories of Nagorny Karabagh, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia were especially important. Differences in approaches to early history were by no means insignificant to the creation of the ideology of confrontation, which played a major role in the Karabagh, Abkhazian and South Ossetian tragedies.



Map 1 Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and their neighbors

Part I

THE ARMENIAN-AZERI CONFRONTATION

CHAPTER 1

MYTHS AND IDENTITY

Intensive ethnogenetic studies were carried out in Armenia and Azerbaijan from the late 1930s, though their starting points, goals and basic historical sources of information differed drastically from each other (Hewsen 1982; Dudwick 1990; 1994; Astourian 1994). First, the writing down of history began in Armenia during the late 1st Millennium A. D., whereas it came to be established in Azerbaijan only in the 20th century. Second, the Armenians had every reason to date the beginning of their glorious state tradition to the Hellenistic period. By contrast the first independent Republic of Azerbaijan was established as late as 1918. Finally, the Armenians had been known as a distinct ethnic group with their own name since the 1st Millennium B.C., whereas the consolidation of the Muslim Turks as a coherent ethnic body took place in Azerbaijan only in the 1920s – 1930s, when the name “Azerbaijani” first gained popularity among the general public.

The term “Azerbaijan” comes from the name of the Persian warlord, Atropat (4th century B.C.). Initially it was pronounced Atrapatakan (Arm.) or Azerbiijan (Arab.) and covered the north-eastern province of Persia, situated southwest of the Caspian Sea. This is the only scholarly explanation of the name, which is referred to by all the standard textbooks of history of Azerbaijan (Pakhomov 1923: 10; Sysoev 1925a: 9-10, 1925b: V-VI; Diakonov 1981a: 91; Aliev 1989c: 32-38; Altstadt 1992: 2; Swietochowski 1995: 1; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 81). The Shirvan and Arran territories were situated north of this region. During the reign of Alexander III, these two became called respectively the Baku and Yelisavetpol provinces (*guberniya*). It was at that time that European scholars and journalists began to use the name “Azerbaijan” for both of them (Swietochowski 1995: 16). In Russia the name was picked up only after 1917, only because the “Azeri Turks”, related to the Azeris of Persia, lived there (Pakhomov 1923: 11; Sysoev 1925a: 9-10, 1925b: V-VI, 17-18; Krymsky 1934: 291). The term “Azeri Turks” was first introduced in 1891 by a liberal Baku newspaper, “Kashkül”, in the hope that this identity could successfully compete with the Muslim identity popular among the common people (Swietochowski 1995: 34). From the very late 19th century the term spread across Yelisavetpol province as a self-designation (Swietochowski 1991: 59; Altstadt 1992: 78-79).

Yet, until the beginning of the 20th century, local nomadic people still identified themselves mainly according to the names of their tribes, and settled

populations identified themselves by local names. Sometimes the terms “Muslims” and “Tatars” were also used, and “Turks”, a politicized term, became fashionable at the beginning of the 20th century. However, the name “Azerbaijani” was still unknown (Alekperov 1960: 73-74). Even in the early 1920s, there was no standard form for spelling “Azerbaijan”, and one could come across “Aderbeijan”, “Azerbeijan” and “Adzerbeijan” in the very same article (for example, see Samoilovich 1924).

On May 28, 1918, for the first time the name “Azerbaijan” was adopted as the name of the state by the National Soviet of Azerbaijan. Immediately, Iran lodged a protest, suspecting that the new republic would claim Iran’s northwestern province as its own. This suspicion was by no means unreasonable because, during the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan unification with Iranian Azerbaijan was planned for the future (Pakhomov 1923: 11; Bartold 1963: 703). Moreover, initially there was no consensus in Azerbaijan which particular language, Turkish or Azeri, should be used as the literary language of the new state (Swietochowski 1991: 57-61, 1995: 68-69, 79). In fact, the term “Azerbaijanis” only gradually won popularity. Even in the 1920s, the Azeris were often called the “Azerbaijani Turks” or the “Azerbaijani Tatars”, and this name was confirmed by the All-Union Turkology Congress held in Baku in 1926. The leader of the republic, Nariman Narimanov, called himself a “Turk” until the end of his days. Only after 1936 did the name “Azerbaijanis” win final victory. That achievement was, according to the plan of the central authorities, to isolate the local inhabitants from the Turkic world and reduce the attraction of pan-Turkism (Alekperov 1960: 71-74; Altstadt 1991: 81-82, 1992: XIX, 70, 124; Swietochowski 1995: 126; Saroyan 1996: 403-404). At the same time, this self-designation sounds like the “Azerbaijani Turks” in the Azeri language. This introduces an element of confusion and fails to shape a clear identity. Even worse, the Azeris are called “Turkmen” in Iraq and simply “Shi’a Muslims” in Iran (Guseinov 1992).

Thus, from the very beginning ethnogenetic studies had different meanings for the Armenians and the Azeris. As was pointed out by Nora Dudwick, a sense of a national entity grew up very early among the Armenians, who take themselves to be not just a cultural-linguistic community but also one based on genetically acquired qualities (also see Phillips 1989: 23-24). As the Armenians have a large and long-standing Diaspora, they make an emphasis on an ethnic nation, which gives them the right to both physical existence and the establishment of their own state. Moreover, depending on their own history, different Armenian groups develop different views of the Armenian past and identity. An important symbol for them is the notion of the “Motherland”, which is linked with the territory in which one can trace the long continuous development of the Armenian people. Yet, the center of the Armenian political life moved in space and several different historical Armenias existed in the past. Therefore, distinct Armenian groups view their “iMotherland” and its history in a different way. What they share altogether is a symbol of the Motherland represented by mount Ararat. A memory of the Kingdom of Tigran the

Great plays an important role in their identity, and they remember this much better than any history of the later Armenian states (Phillips 1989: 34-38). The Armenian Church, which consolidated the Armenians, who lacked their own state, and a bitter memory of the genocide of 1915 are among the other significant symbols of the Armenian identity. The Armenian language and personal names contribute to shaping of the Armenian identity, but their role is by no means universal, as the Armenians in the Diaspora are gradually losing them (Phillips 1989: 2-3, 17, 23-24; Mirak 1997; Dekmejian 1997). This book focuses only on those Armenians who lived in Soviet Armenia.

By contrast to the Armenians, the notion of “Umma”, i.e. the unity of all true Muslims, governed the Azeri mind until recently. True, it was colored by Shi’a Islam, which places distance between the Azeris and Sunni groups and encourages close cultural and political links with Iran. The modern feeling of unity is quite new to the Azeris and emerged within the recent secular political tradition that is oriented towards Turkey and emphasizes the priority of the state. That is why a uniform state that unites the Azeris as a national body is of incredible value to them.

As Nora Dudwick put it, both their uneasy history and the huge Diaspora caused the Armenians to shape their identity on the basis of a nation perceived in ethnic terms, whereas the Azeris associate their entity primarily with their state. For centuries, the Armenians used to legitimize their political and cultural claims with references to their early history, and the Azeris emphasized their living tradition; the Armenians took special notice of historical monuments and historical memory, whereas the Azeris stressed the important role of highland pastures in their subsistence economy, based on a transhumance pastoralism. Thus, it was territory rather than history that until recently was of importance for the Azeris, who identified their homeland with their native habitat (*vatan*). On their side, the Armenians associated their Motherland (*hairenik*) with the territory where their ancestors lived to the extent that notions of shared history and territory blended with each other (Dudwick 1995: 22-23, 1996: 433-437). Moreover, traditionally the Azeris most appreciated local bonds and associated themselves primarily with some local area (“the minor Motherland”). That is why their national self-awareness, which was formed in the 20th century, was much weaker than that of the neighboring Armenians and Georgians (Furman 1993: 17-18). Further on, we shall see how this “local consciousness” negates the consolidating function of language, how it is superimposed upon national identity and causes Azerbaijanization of not only all the contemporary inhabitants of Azerbaijan but also the monuments from the remote past.

From the very beginning, Azeri intellectuals considered it their major obligation to shape a national self-awareness among the Azeris. They did this in various ways, however. When, in the 1970s, Azeri poets were attracted by the idea of the Motherland they emphasized the surrounding natural environment and its nourishing resources. At the same time, since the very late 19th century, Azeri intellectuals were beginning to enrich the concept of the territorial Motherland with

a sense of the past (for that, see Altstadt 1992: 188, 291, note 60). This trend governed Azeri historical discipline in the 20th century, and for decades Azeri historians did their best to supplement Azeri consciousness with a sense of the past and to overcome the traditional attitudes about both territory and the Motherland described by Nora Dudwick. Azeri democrats were most fascinated by European secular tradition and used Turkey as a reference state. It is no wonder that they appreciated the pan-Turkic idea, which nourished one of the most influential political myths in Azerbaijan (Furman 1993).

Sergei Lezov describes the Armenian and the Azeri myths in his own way. He distinguishes among three aspects of the Armenian myth: first, the belief in the Armenian role as a civilizer, based on the classic historical heritage; second, self-identification as a stronghold of Christianity in the East; third, the self-image as the eternal victim of oriental barbarians, suffering for the sake of humanity. To put it differently, the Armenians depict themselves as a chosen people, who, on the one hand, are the bearers of the highest wisdom, and on the other hand, are fated to be forever defenseless victims. This reasoning shapes the “anti-Turkic identity”, deeply rooted in the minds of many Armenians, which causes relative isolation within the international community. On the other side, the Azeri myth focuses on the insidiousness of the Armenians and the credulity of the Azeris (Lezov 1992). As a result, by the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, both neighboring republics were dominated by quite opposite albeit symmetric attitudes – in Armenia they believed in the “Turanian conspiracy”, and in Azerbaijan the “Armenian conspiracy” was on the agenda (Dubnov 1996: 15; Dzebisashvili 2000: 152). On both sides, people were convinced that the opposite side was making unreasonable claims on neighboring lands, their past, the memory of historical and cultural activists, and crucial national symbols embedded in these lands (Dudwick 1994).

With the growth of ethnic tensions, the role of ethnogenetic constructions was not restricted to cognitive factors alone. They had to help the Armenians recover after the Genocide of 1915 and provide them psychological protection against the “Turkic threat”. Under this umbrella the Azeris were indiscriminately and erroneously identified with the Turkish people (Dudwick 1994; Herzig 1996: 255). Of concern to the Azeris was that initially ethnogenetic studies could establish a solid basis for their identity and isolate them from pan-Turkism, which was treated by the Soviet authorities as a dreadful threat to the unity of Soviet peoples.

CHAPTER 2

FROM TIGRAN THE GREAT TO SOVIET ARMENIA

The Armenians were referred to, among various subjugated peoples, for the first time in history in the famous Behistun inscription by the Persian King Darius I (522-486 B.C.). However, their history began much earlier. Scholars assume that an invaluable contribution to the formation of the Armenian people was brought about by Urartu inhabitants, who were assimilated *en masse* by Armenian ancestors, who came from the West. At the same time, there are no good reasons to link an emergence of the Urartian state and its history from the 9th century until its decline at the beginning of the 6th century with any Armenian activity (Redgate 1998: 5).

In Soviet scholarship, the origins of the Armenian people were thoughtfully discussed by the major expert in the Ancient Near East, Igor M. Diakonov (1915-1999)¹). The central ideas of his seminal book (Diakonov 1968) are still not out of date and worth considering here. In his view, the remote Armenian ancestors had arrived in Asia Minor from the Balkans by the 12th century B.C. By language, they are in the Thracian-Phrygian group in the Indo-European family of languages. This group has nothing in common with the Hurrian-Urartian languages that were widespread in Anatolia and northernmost Mesopotamia in the 3rd – 2nd Millennia B.C., and in many respects differed from the Hittite-Luwian languages of Asia Minor of the 2nd – very early 1st Millennia B.C. Historians identify the Armenian ancestors with the Mushki, who were mentioned in the area between the Northern Taurus and the Sasun Hills in 1165 B.C. According to Assyrian inscriptions, they occupied the “country of Alzzi” between the Euphrates and the Lower Aratsani (Murat-Su) Rivers, where the Hurrites had lived earlier. Later on, the Assyrians called the Phrygians the “Mushki”. That is why historians identify the early Mushki with the Thracian-Phrygian groups as well (Diakonov 1968: 118-119, 123-124, 194, 204-209, 214-224, 1983: 169-170, 174; Russell 1997: 23-26; Redgate 1998: 16. Also see Manandian 1943: 5-6; Astourian 1994: 44-45). These Mushki were already reigned over by kings with Hurrian and Luwian names. This means that at that time the Armenians either were governed by local rulers or rulers who had borrowed local names. In any case, the newcomers were a minor group among the numerous local inhabitants (Diakonov 1968: 134-135; Redgate 1998: 17).

Diakonov thought that in the 9th – 8th centuries B.C., partly forced by the Assyrians, partly removed by the Urartian kings, and partly driven by the Cimmerian raids, the Armenians settled throughout the territory of Urartu. Today

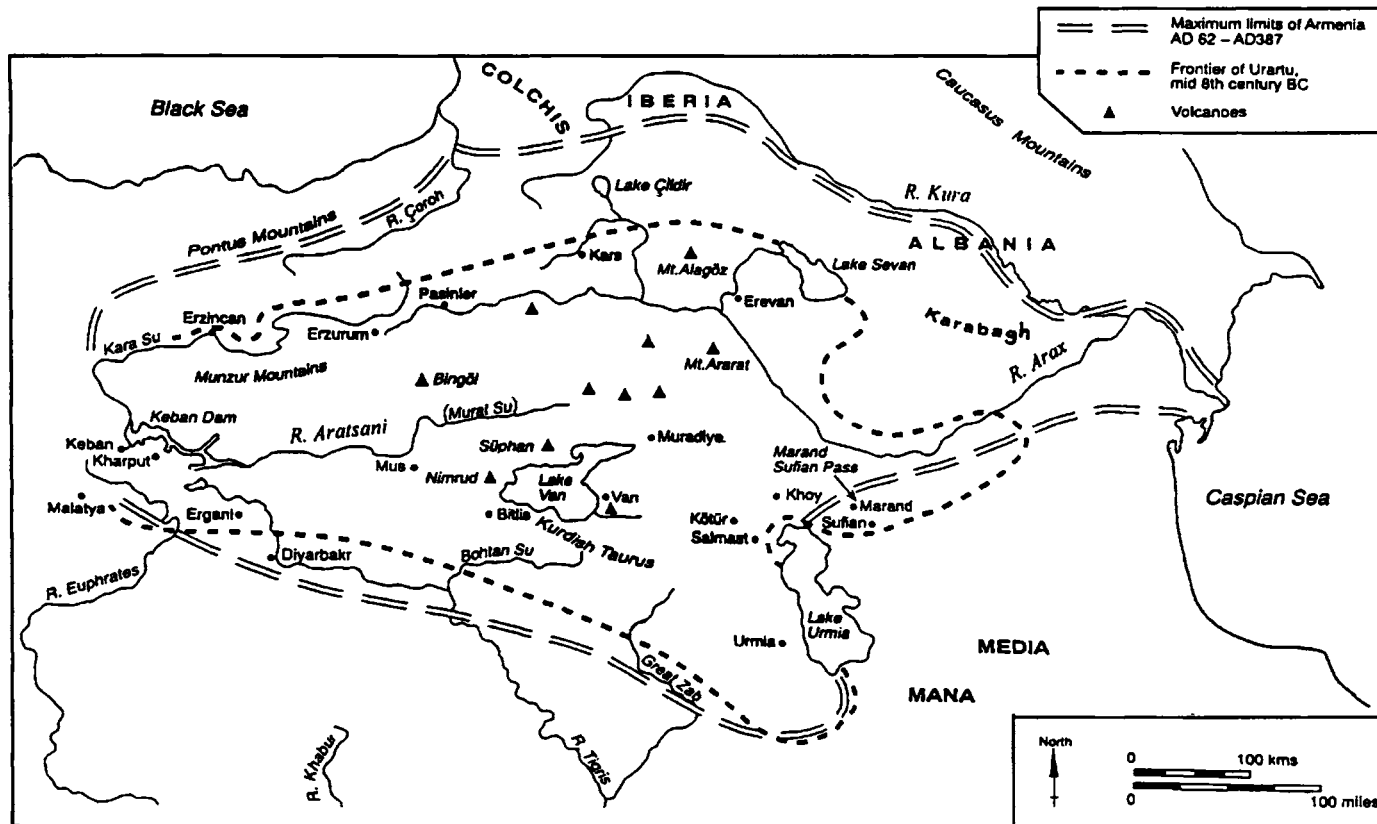
there are reasons to believe that the main body of the newcomers were brought to Urartu from the west in the early 7th century B.C. by the king Rusa II who used them in his ambitious construction projects (Zimansky 2001). They merged with the Urartians after Urartu was finally destroyed by the Medes in 590 B.C. The Urartian role in the formation of the Armenian people was so significant that Diakonov used to call the Armenians “descendants of the Urartians, who shifted to an Indo-European language”, although he also recognized contributions from the Hurrites, Luwians and Mushki. Yet, he argued that the core of the Armenian population consisted of local Urartian inhabitants, who had shifted to the language of the newcomers (Diakonov 1968: 230-234, 237-243, 1983: 153, 168-171. See also Russell 1997: 29-31).

Melid and Tabal, once situated in the modern Malatia region, are considered to be the first Armenian kingdoms. They were active in the 8th – 7th centuries B.C. and probably even later, but suffered heavy blows from the Assyrians (Diakonov 1968: 180-188, 243; Redgate 1998: 17-21).

An origin of the name “Armenia” is still obscure. It is usually assumed that the Greeks borrowed it from the Persians, who, on their side, picked it up from the Arameans. The latter used it initially for the inhabitants of the Arme region, where they made first contact with the proto-Armenians; later on, the name was applied to the entire population of former Urartu (Diakonov 1968: 234-235, 1983: 173; Redgate 1998: 23). The Armenian self-designation is “Hayq”. However, there is no reason to relate it to the historical land of Hayasa in the Upper Çoroh River basin, far north of the early proto-Armenian area. It is more correct to conclude that “Hayq” is derived from the Urartian term “Hattini”, which meant the “Hittites”. The Urartians initially used this term for the proto-Armenian newcomers; after their merger with each other it turned into a self-designation (Diakonov 1983: 172; Russell 1997: 22, 25; Redgate 1998: 24).

By the end of the era from the 12th to the 9th century B.C., the state of Nairi was identified with the northwestern part of the territory where the future historical Armenia was later situated, but it is less known and its links with the Armenian past are far from clear (Redgate 1998: 27). More reliable evidence of an Armenian state dates from 590 B.C. when it replaced Urartu (map 2). Recently, scholars have begun to trace the continuity between early Armenia and Urartu that is confirmed by a substantial Urartian sub-stratum in the Armenian language, revealed by linguists. This especially involves continuity between the Urartian and Armenian elite that is reflected in rulers’ names, tribal names and some place names. In particular, the Urartian name Erebuni still echoes in the name of the contemporary Armenian capital, the name of the Urartian capital Tushpa is secured in the Armenian city of Tosp, and the like (Russell 1997: 29-31; Redgate 1998: 51-54).

In 522 B.C. the Persian king Darius I conquered Armenia, and up to the Hellenic period it was included in the Achaemenian Empire. Almost no evidence of Armenia survives from that time; it is even unclear if there was any Armenian state (Garsoian 1997a: 38-44; Redgate 1998: 55). However, it is well known that the



Map 2 Urartu, Armenia and their neighbors (after Redgate 1998)

Orontes dynasty ruled in Armenia from 331 to 189 B.C. In order to secure the former Persian administrative system, Alexander the Great used to appoint Persian noblemen as the heads of provinces. He made the Persian warlord, Mithranes, the ruler of Armenia. He is believed to have been the son of king Orontes. Although formally the Orontids were subordinated to the Seleucids, in fact their power over Armenia was unrestricted (Garsoian 1997a: 45; Redgate 1998: 57, 62).

In 189 B.C., the dynasty in Armenia was replaced, and the country was partitioned between kings Artashes (188-161 B.C.) and Zareh. They were independent rulers, who occupied themselves with territorial expansion. Among the other annexed lands, they conquered the land of Siunik on the left of the Arax River, although little is known of their policy of expansion. In 95-55 B.C., Armenia was ruled by Tigran the Great. While playing off the conflicting interests of Parthia and Rome, he managed to secure Armenian sovereignty and, incredibly, extended its borders. He incorporated the lands around Lake Urmia and further eastward (Media Atropatene). Then he conquered all the Syrian lands as far as Egypt in the South and Phoenicia and Cilicia in the West (Garsoian 1997a: 55; Redgate 1998: 65-69). There is no direct evidence that he conquered Caucasian Albania, but it is known that he appropriated Kambisene on the left bank of the Middle Kura River. In Tigran's time, Armenia became known as Greater Armenia (Redgate 1998: 69). By the 60s B.C., his huge empire had been partitioned by the Romans, and the Armenian territory had shrunk drastically. As a result, the Artashes Dynasty had fallen into decline, and Armenia became dependent on foreign powers. At first, its rulers were subordinate to Rome. Then, the Parthian Arsacid Dynasty (A.D. 66-298) came into power. In formal terms, Armenia was still subordinate to Rome, but in fact, it was greatly affected by Parthia, and the Parthian Arsacids considered themselves sovereign rulers of Armenia. They waged wars against the Roman Empire, albeit not very successfully, and from time to time extensive parts of Armenia came under Roman jurisdiction. After the late 3rd century, powerful Sussanian Persia claimed the Armenian lands. At that time, the term "Greater Armenia" lost its political meaning but secured its geographical importance (Redgate 1998: 88-112).

Thus, the Armenian eastward expansion could be depicted as follows. In the mid-5th century B.C., Herodotus was aware that the Armenians lived west of the Saspis and the Alarodians. Xenophon, who visited the area in 401-400 B.C. confirmed this. He wrote that after he entered the land of the Phasians and Taochi, i.e. the territory that was to become the northern part of historical Armenia, he left the Armenians far behind. The Orontids were the governors of Armenia during the Achaemenian period. Alexander the Great approved their political status, and by 190 B.C. their capital was already in Armavir in the Ararat Valley. Even earlier, they extended their northern borders up to Lake Sevan, where they built a fortress named Garni. In brief, the Armenian settlement of the central part of the Armenian plateau was closely linked to the collapse of the Achaemenian Empire. According to Strabo, Siunik and Caspiana were first conquered by king Artashes, i.e. not before

the early 2nd century B.C. Before that, the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers belonged to Media; various groups lived there but the Armenians were unknown among them (Hewsen 1982: 31-33; Redgate 1998: 51, 63, 67).

The Armenians were baptized in the early 4th century A.D. (Garsoian 1997b: 81-84; Redgate 1998: 113-132). By A.D. 370, the Armenian governor, Mushegh Mamikonean, had seized back vast territories from Persia and Rome, including a substantial part of the right bank of the Kura River. This was a transient success though, and in A.D. 387 Armenia was partitioned by Rome and Persia. Since that time, the eastern part of Armenia, including the right bank of the Kura River, was long a Sussanian domain (*Marzpanate*), but Caucasian Albania was still beyond Persian power. The Armenian kings began to lose their lands and jurisdiction, and in A.D. 428 their power was finally abolished (Redgate 1998: 135-139).

In the early 5th century, Mesrob Mashtots (ca. 350-439/440) introduced the Armenian alphabet. This began a cultural renaissance – in particular, theological manuscripts were translated into Armenian. Then, the enlightening activity of Mesrob Mashtots resulted in the introduction of alphabets to Iberia and Caucasian Albania as well. We shall see further on that there were lively debates among scholars concerning whether Caucasian Albania had its own literature or not. There is still no evidence about that. Yet it is well established that Albania was highly affected by the Armenian literary tradition (Thomson 1997: 230; Redgate 1998: 140-141). Mesrob Mashtots and his alphabet are very important symbols of Armenian identity and their struggle for sovereignty. In 1989, when, for the first time, Yerevan observed the popular national movement, one could see Armenian schoolchildren singing the Armenian alphabet as a revolutionary song (Ishkhanian 1991: 35, note 78).

The Arabs first invaded Armenia in A.D. 640, and in the 8th century they subjugated it. The Armenians revolted, and after unsuccessful uprisings sought asylum in Byzantium. Their struggle was rewarded: in A.D. 884, the Arab Caliphate agreed to approve the new Bagratid Dynasty, which re-established the Armenian state in Southern Transcaucasia and ruled there until A.D. 1071. In A.D. 902, Armenia incorporated Nachjivan and Siunik, but in a few years ceded them to the Arabs (Redgate 1998: 202, 204).

In the late 10th century, the Armenian Bagratids got independence from the Arab rulers, and a new but a brief period of prosperity commenced. The capital of the state was situated in the city of Ani. This flourishing was not long lasting: in A.D. 1045 Ani was taken by Byzantium, and in A.D. 1071 the Seljuq Turks subjugated Armenia. Later on, the only Armenian state that outlasted all these catastrophes was the one that survived in Cilicia from 1097 to 1220 (Redgate 1998: 224-225, 256-259).

After the decline of Bagratid power, only a few small polities ruled by the Armenians were known in Transcaucasia. One of them was the Khachen Principality (historical Artsakh, known as Karabagh since the 13th century), which developed between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1266. In the 12th century, it served as an

apple of discord between the Armenians and the Seljuq Turks. Then, after the latter received a heavy blow from the Georgians, the Khachen Principality, together with some other Armenian provinces, became a vassal of Georgia and enjoyed a brief flourishing in the early 13th century (Redgate 1998: 258). However, after the 14th century Armenia suffered a long period of a decline, while, after A.D. 1400, being ruled by the Turkmen Dynasty of Kara Kojunlu.

A new cultural revival began in Armenia in the mid-19th century, when one could observe the growth of national self-awareness and a search for political allies. At that time, Muslim refugees from the Balkans and Northern Caucasus flooded eastern Anatolia. The Muslim population was growing rapidly, and the Armenians treated that as an obvious threat to themselves.

In 1894-1896, the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II arranged the first Armenian slaughter, when about 200 thousand Armenians were murdered. That is why some Armenian leaders supported the Young Turks' movement, in the hope that they could dethrone the Sultan and establish justice. These hopes never came to fruition. Although the liberals obtained a Constitution, introduced in 1908, and the next year the Sultan abdicated the throne, he was replaced by extreme nationalists. In World War I, the Ottoman Empire supported Germany and Austro-Hungary. In 1915, the Armenians suffered genocide, and according to various estimates, up to 1-1.5 million Armenians were killed from 1915 to 1922. During that time, 300 thousand Armenians found refuge in Eastern Armenia. In 1918, in accordance with the Treaty of Sèvres the Armenian Republic had to be established in Transcaucasia and Eastern Anatolia. The Kemal Atatürk movement broke up this plan. Thus, the Republic of Armenia was established only in Transcaucasia in the period from 1918 to 1920. Later on, after Bolshevik Russia appropriated Armenia, it lost Nagorny Karabagh and Nachjivan, which were included in Azerbaijan, and the Akhalkalaki region that went to Georgia. Then there were Kars and Ardahan that had belonged to Russia since 1878 but were now given to Turkey, and the Surmala area to the southeast of Yerevan, that was ceded to Iran.

In the 1920s – 1930s, Armenia underwent the same processes as the rest of the Soviet republics. The only difference was that, due to its homogeneous ethnic composition, it managed to avoid the forced Russification imposed on many other regions after 1934. Even in 1938, 77.7 percent of Armenian children were studying at schools that used Armenian as the language of instruction, and only 2.8 percent were in Russian-speaking schools (Suny 1983: 58). At the same time Armenia did not escape the Soviet purges directed against the Armenian Communists, peasants and intellectuals in the late 1920s and 1930s (Sarkisyanz 1975: 312-320; Suny 1997: 355, 360, 362-363).

Another Armenian feature was the huge Diaspora abroad. The Armenians were the only people in the USSR whose people of the Diaspora were welcome to repatriate after 1945. In 1946-1947 from 85 to 110 thousand Armenians repatriated to the historical Motherland, although they were met with by no means a warm attitude there, and many of them were exiled to Siberia or Central Asia. Among

these was the well-known activist of the Syrian Communist Party, the father of the future first president of independent Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian (Sarkisyanz 1975: 328-329; Suny 1997: 367-368; Goldenberg 1994: 138; Iskandarian, Arutiunian 1999: 152). Simultaneously, 150 thousand Azeris were resettled from Armenia to Azerbaijan. The Azeri authors connect this with the return of repatriates (Alijarly 1990: 128. See also Van der Leeuw 2000: 128), and the Armenian authors relate it to the project for the development of new lands in Azerbaijan. In any case, this was not a persecution, and after Stalin's death, the Azeris returned to their former areas (Barsegov 1998: 138).

In the 1950s – 1970s, Armenia witnessed much faster industrial growth than the USSR in general. In 1960-1978, the gross revenue per capita had grown by 162 percent in Armenia and by 149 percent in the USSR in general. By 1975, industrial workers accounted up to 38 percent of the working population in Armenia, 28 percent in Azerbaijan, and 27 percent in Georgia. In Armenia, 42 percent of the workers were engaged in the service industry; that was higher than in the USSR in general (40 percent). These numbers look even more impressive if we recall that more than 80 percent of the Armenians had occupied themselves in the rural economy in the 1920s. In brief, Armenian SSR observed a very high rate of modernization. By the early 1980s, 66 percent of the Armenians lived in cities, and more than 70 percent of them graduated from high school or a university. At the same time, Armenia was still highly homogeneous – 89.7 percent of its population was of Armenian origin in 1979. Almost all of them were quite fluent in their mother tongue. The Armenians demonstrated a high level of mobility, and a large Armenian Diaspora has developed within the USSR. Only 65.5 percent of the Armenians lived in the Armenian SSR in 1979, the remaining 35.5 percent (2,725 thousand) were dispersed into other Soviet republics (Suny 1983: 75-77).

Experts distinguish between two kinds of nationalism in Soviet Armenia – the official (modest) and the dissident (radical) ones. In contrast to other ethnic nationalisms in the USSR, the Armenian form was aimed at the Turks rather than the Russians. For a long time the Armenians have demonstrated an anti-Turkic attitude with a racial flavor (Suny 1983: 11, 78, 1997: 376; Bennigsen 1986: 137). The Armenians themselves recognized this. For example, in 1985 a secretary of the Communist Party branch at Yerevan University said that, "...Armenian patriotism means love of Russia and hatred towards the Turks" (Ishkhanian 1991: 10). Russophilism in Armenia was the direct result of a feeling of being alone in the face of powerful neighbors, and Armenian nationalists never tired of talking about the dozen million Azeris, Turks, Kurds, Iranians, and Georgians, who surrounded Armenia (Ishkhanian 1991: 27-29).

For the first time, the Armenian nationalist movement manifested itself during the thaw. The Union of Patriots was established at Yerevan University in 1956. Then it was expressed again by the Union of Armenian Youth in 1963. These did not so much target Russification, which was not a hot issue in Armenia, but rather the re-establishment of a sovereign Armenian state. In 1966, the National Unity

Party emerged in Yerevan and proclaimed the re-establishment of an Armenian state that would embrace both Eastern (Soviet) and Western (Turkish) Armenia, including Nachjivan and Artsakh (Nagorny Karabagh). The next year, 23 students were expelled from Yerevan University for their anti-Soviet activities (Goldenberg 1994: 139; Dudwick 1997: 481).

The first mass manifestation of Armenian nationalism took place on April 24, 1965. On that day, the authorities in Soviet Armenia, together with the Armenian clergy, met at the Yerevan Opera House to express their grief in memory of the 50th anniversary of the genocide of 1915. The event stirred up a hundred thousand Armenians, who poured into Yerevan's streets and claimed the lands of Eastern Turkey as well as Nagorny Karabagh. The Armenian authorities and the catholicos, Vazgen I, had to do their best to calm the crowd (Suny 1983: 78, 1997: 376-377; Goldenberg 1994: 139; Dudwick 1997: 481). During that period, Levon Ter-Petrosian was first put in jail for his active participation in the campaign, demanding the erection of a monument to the genocide victims. Yet, in a few years the authorities erected this monument themselves. Furthermore, a statue of Vardan Mamikonian was erected in memory of his protection of Armenian Christianity in the 5th century. After that, a monument to General Andranik (Ozanian), a hero of the Armenian-Azeri war of 1918 – 1919, was erected in his native village. Since the end of the 1960s, many concerts and festivals in Armenia concluded with clear manifestations of Armenian patriotism and slogans expressing hope for the revival of the Motherland (*hairenik*) (Suny 1983: 79).

In 1974, the KGB detected the National Unity Party, and its leaders were arrested. Its head, Stepan Zatikian, was charged with terrorism; party activists were accused of causing an explosion in the Moscow subway in January 1977. Another party leader, Paroyr Airikian, was arrested even earlier, in 1969. He spent 17 years in jail. In 1988, as a member of the Karabagh movement, he was deprived of Soviet citizenship and exiled to Ethiopia (Suny 1983: 79-80, 1997: 377; Goldenberg 1994: 139-140). In April 1977, the more moderate Armenian Helsinki group was established in Yerevan, but all its activists were arrested in December of that year.

Two main problems were of much concern to the Armenians during the last two Soviet decades – that of the status of the Armenian language and of Nagorny Karabagh. In 1978, together with Georgia and Azerbaijan, Armenia obtained State status for the Armenian language in the new Soviet Constitution (Suny 1983: 79-80; Dudwick 1997: 482). Since the 1960s, the situation in Nagorny Karabagh had been deteriorating. There were 162 thousand people there in 1979, 123 thousand of them being Armenians and 37 thousand Azeris. The Armenians were fluent in both the Armenian and Russian languages, and hardly any of them could speak Azeri. For years, the Armenians complained that Nagorny Karabagh had poor financial support as compared with other regions of Azerbaijan, and that the Armenian culture was neglected there. Further, the Armenians were suffering a negative demographic trend. Between 1921 and 1979, the number of Armenians in Karabagh diminished from 124.1 thousand to 123 thousand; in contrast, the number of Azeris

increased from 7.4 thousand to 37 thousand. The Azeris accounted for 90 percent of the Shusha population in 1979. In 1963, the Karabagh Armenians sent a petition to Khrushchev with 2,500 signatures, in which they complained about Azeri chauvinism and a policy aimed at forcing the Armenians out of the area. They did not receive any response, and inter-ethnic clashes occurred in Stepanakert at the end of the year that took 18 lives. Two years later, the Karabagh Armenians demonstrated their solidarity with the people of Yerevan, who demanded unification of the former Armenian lands, including Nagorny Karabagh. In July 1965, the Karabagh Armenians sent a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU with complaints about discrimination on the part of the Azerbaijan authorities; they also asked for a transfer of Nagorny Karabagh to the Armenian SSR. The letter bore 45 thousand signatures. Yet negotiations between Armenian and Azeri authorities in 1966 proved unable to change the situation (Grant 1991: 45; Suny 1993: 195; Goldenberg 1994: 161).

On March 23, 1975, a First Secretary of the Nagorny Karabagh branch of the Comsomol, Yasha Bablian, read a poem in public that was full of nostalgia for the Armenian lands in Turkey. He was fired for doing that and removed from Karabagh. In 1977, the well-known Soviet writer, a member of the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party, Serik Hanzadian, who was a native of Karabagh, was sent to investigate. His mission resulted in his writing a letter to Brezhnev that stated that Nagorny Karabagh should be transferred to Armenia (Suny 1983: 80-81). Thus, the nationalism of Armenia was closely connected with the formation of an Armenian nation that had no desire to dissolve in the Soviet sea and, while recalling the genocide of 1915, did its best to struggle for existence. Some experts argue that the conflict in Karabagh was about identity rather than economy (for example, see Rutland 1994: 846).

Since 1988, escalation of the conflict has been observed, which has caused vigorous mobilization of both the Armenian and Azeri nationalist movements and resulted in a bloody war with many casualties (Suny 1993: 197-212; Goldenberg 1994: 162-173; Croissant 1998). It is in this environment that, since the very late 1980s, the Armenian mass media introduced the term Artsakh to the general public; before that, only a few professional historians used the term (Iskandarian, Arutunian 1999: 153).

The Armenian nationalists won a decisive victory in the parliamentary elections of May 1990. On August 4, Levon Ter-Petrosian was elected the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR, and Vazgen Manukian became the Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers. After that, a non-Communist government was formed in Armenia, which made the achievement of independence its priority and issued a declaration of sovereignty on August 25, 1990. At the same time, the Armenian leaders disagreed on the means and pace of the movement towards independence (Suny 1993: 239-245; Rutland 1994: 851-856; Goldenberg 1994: 143). All the same, even in its first declaration the new government clearly demonstrated its aspiration to carry out what had been the dream of Armenian

nationalists for years – the Soviet-Turkish treaty on the state borders signed in 1921 was declared invalid. Turkey was called to recognize publicly the crimes committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians, and the international community was asked to qualify the slaughter of 1915 as the genocide of the Armenian people (Goldenberg 1994: 143).

Despite all of Ter-Petrosian's efforts to avoid radicalization of Armenian nationalism, political parties emerged in Armenia demanding that all practical steps be taken in order to implement the August declaration. One of these parties was the Union for Self-Determination, established by Paroyr Airikian, who had come back from exile. The Union claimed the territory of Nachjivan from Azerbaijan, and the Armenian lands from Turkey (Goldenberg 1994: 144).

Then, on September 23, 1991, Armenia declared its independence, and on October 16, Ter-Petrosian was elected the first president of independent Armenia (Suny 1993: 245). The emergence of the democratic Republic of Armenia was accompanied by exacerbation of the Nagorny Karabagh conflict. By the early 1990s, it had turned into a true war, which was arrested only in May 1994. Yet, even now, no peace treaty has been signed, and the legal status of Nagorny Karabagh is still unclear. All of this provokes mutual distrust and feeds those historical myths that are the focus of this book.

CHAPTER 3

MYTH AND POLITICS IN ARMENIA: FROM MIGRANTS TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

A concept of the formation of the Armenian people put forward by Diakonov was called the “classical thesis” by Stephan Astourian (Astourian 1994: 43-45). Yet, this was by no means the first idea of Armenian ethnogenesis. When, in the very late 19th to very early 20th centuries Armenian historians and intellectuals in general were searching for the roots of the Armenian people, they used to refer to a classical work by Moses of Khoren (Movses Khorenatsi), a famous early medieval Armenian historian. Following him, they believed that the legendary Haik was the Armenian forefather, whose line of descent went directly back to the Biblical Noah. In this view, Haik was the founder of the urban civilization near Lake Van during the Bronze Age (Gatteyrias 1882: 13; Ter-Gregor 1897: 15, 36; Gabrielian 1918: 38-39; Aslan 1920: 6-7). Some of these authors argued that the Armenian people had come into being even earlier than the Israelites (Ter-Gregor 1897: 15); that they were closely connected with the Aryan tribe from whom the Semites had borrowed their language and many customs (Gatteyrias 1882: 13; Gabrielian 1918: 61); and that the first state in the Lake Van region was created by the Armenians. At that time, Urartu was either ignored, or, if it was ever mentioned, its kings were called the “Armenian kings” (Gabrielian 1918: 42-44, 49. For that, see Zulalian 1970: 12). At that time the Armenian historian, J. Sandalgian denied a Phrygian origins of the Armenians. He argued that the Armenian plateau was a cradle of the Aryan tribes; that from there they moved to the east and west, and that “Nairi-Urartu” with all its culture, religion and writing system was the Armenian heritage. He identified the Chalybes and Kashka/Kaska of northeastern Anatolia with early Armenians and argues that the Urartians and, partly, Hittites were among the Armenian ancestors. Moreover, he viewed Diauekhi and Colchis among the early Armenian lands (Sandaglian 1917).

At the same time this approach linked Armenians to the family of the Caucasian peoples. This was unacceptable for the emigre Armenian politicians, who identified the “Caucasian orientation” with the Turkish dreams of the all-embracing Turanian state (Avetisian 1997: 149, 156-157). By the mid-20th century, a migration theory had become popular among Armenian historians abroad. They thought the Indo-European ancestors of the Armenians had come out of the Balkan Peninsula. Their migration eastward was dated to the end of the Bronze Age or very

early in the Iron Age. A common opinion was that, after they came to the Lake Van region, they merged with the local inhabitants and that was the beginning of the emergence of the Armenian people (Paelian 1942: 3; Kurkjan 1958: 20-24; Pasdermadjan 1964: 19-23).

Soviet Armenian historians moved along their own path. In the first Soviet decades, when people had fresh memories of genocide and civil war, of democratic Armenia and its territorial losses, when it was very important for the USSR to maintain friendship with neighboring Turkey, it was not easy to write of the early history of Armenia. In the very late 1920s, a booklet titled "Armenia" came out in Moscow, in the popular series, "Our Union". There were no Armenians among its authors, and seven pages seemed enough to them for a review of all the rich history of Armenia. In their representation, Armenia looked like a backwater of the high civilizations that regularly seized and exploited it. The authors located the center of historical Armenia between the Kura and Arax Rivers, and in the attached map this coincided with the territory of the Armenian SSR. Only in passing was it mentioned that for centuries the Armenians had also lived south of there. Early Armenians were depicted as a backward population that depended of the foreigners for almost everything (Bialetsky et al. 1929a: 7-11).

In this environment, Armenian authors had to be very careful, maintaining the memory of their ancestors' glory and at the same time avoiding touching upon painful contemporary issues. B. A. Borian's seminal monograph on the Armenian role in international politics serves as an example of that balancing act. In his book, the author could not but preface his work with a short survey of the early history of Armenia. At the same time, he not only avoided including a map of its territory but also managed to provide no geographical markers at all. The reader could not learn anything about the formation of the Armenian people; Tigran the Great and his vast kingdom were not mentioned at all (Borian 1928: 1-16).

Studies of the ethnogenesis of the Armenian people commenced in Soviet Armenia in the very late 1930s. Initially, in accordance with the general attitude of Soviet historians during the 1920s – 1930s, emphasis was placed on the struggle against Tzarist colonialism. However, Armenian history had its own flavor, and Armenian historians transferred the pathos of the struggle for national liberation to all the previous centuries, when the Armenians did their best to resist either Arabic, or Seljuq, or Tatar aggression. The Karabagh issue was not forgotten, either. An early history of Karabagh was depicted as continuous Armenian colonization and Armenization of the local Albanian population. It was stressed that, since the late 1st century B.C. up to A.D. 387, Karabagh had been an integral part of the Armenian kingdom, and that later on it enjoyed strong cultural and religious Armenian influence. It was recognized that Turkic and Islamic elements gradually infiltrated the region, but an emphasis was placed on the continuity of the Armenian tradition and, especially, on the idea that the Armenian rulers had held their political power throughout Middle Ages, even though they were subordinate to the Persian Shah. The Turkic khans who did their best in order to get access to rich highland

pastures were accused of a final cultural decline in Karabagh, that was reached by the end of the 18th century (Arakelian 1938).

Later on, Soviet Armenian scholars began to study the ethnogenesis of the Armenian people in a much wider context. Initially, they appreciated the migration hypothesis which maintained that the Armenian ancestors were close relatives of the Phrygians, Thracians and Greeks, that they had come to Asia Minor from the Balkans and had for centuries moved eastward until they had settled all over the Armenian plateau (for example, see Abegian 1948: 7-9). The Academician Ya. A. Manandian was an ardent advocate of this approach (Manandian 1943: 5-7) which was included into the first Soviet school textbook on Armenian history, published in 1944 (Samvelian et al. 1944: 31).

Yet, just after World War II Soviet ideologists began to associate the migration concept with German Nazi propaganda that claimed that, while being "Indo-Germans", the Armenians were aliens in the Caucasus (Piotrovsky 1995: 272-273). Thus, the Indo-European descent of the Armenians as well as the migration concept were tossed out of the agenda; it became unsafe to talk about them, and Armenian authors began a hectic search for alternative approaches that would deliver them of accusations of political disloyalty. Hence, the appropriation of the country of Hayasa together with its name.

There are only a few pieces of historical evidence of Hayasa, and historians treat it as a remote provincial area; there is no unanimous view of its location (for that, see Kapantsian 1947: 9-12). Yet, most scholars locate it in the southeast Black Sea region or in the Upper Çoroh River Valley. Diakonov proved that the proto-Armenians never lived there, and that the "h" sound in the Armenian self-designation differs phonetically from the one with which the name "Hayasa" begins. The Armenian self-designation "Hayq" originates from the proto-Armenian *Hati'ios, which in its turn is closely related to the Urartian "Hate", which meant an "inhabitant of lands west of the Euphrates River". The Urartians used the latter designation for the Hittites or those who arrived from the Hittite kingdom, including proto-Armenians coming from the west. After the Urartians merged with them, this term became their self-designation (Diakonov 1968: 81-82, 211-212, 235-236, 1981a: 91, 1983: 157, 172, 1993. See also Russell 1997: 22; Redgate 1998: 24).

An aspiration to identify their remote ancestors with Hayasa's inhabitants, rooted in the late 1940s, became commonplace among Armenian scholars. The Academician Manandian was one of the first in Soviet Armenia to be attracted to Hayasa. In his representation, the proto-Armenians, or the Phrygians-Mushki, were aggressive pastoralists, who conquered the territory of the former state of Urartu in the 6th century B.C. It is not clear to what extent they were a success, since very soon the region was seized by the Medes, then by the Persians. Yet, the proto-Armenians managed to assimilate the local Urartian population. In the view of Manandian, the local Armenian ancestors lived in the country of Hayasa, where they were called the "Hay". The Phrygian newcomers were called the "Armins", by

which they were known at the time of Darius (Manandian 1943: 5-7)²).

By the mid-1950s, Manandian had made some corrections to his conception. He persistently argued that the Armenians originated from two quite different populations – one indigenous and another one made up of newcomers. He located the indigenous ancestors west of Lake Van in the basin of the Aratsani River, where, in his view, the country of Hayasa flourished in the 14th – 8th centuries B.C., and known by the Assyrians as a tribal alliance of the Nairi. He maintained that its capital was called Hayasa, whereas the local people were known as the Azzi. Manandian avoided discussing the linguistic affiliation of the local inhabitants, but it is clear that he identified them with the Alarodians, or Yaphetides (i.e., the Hurrian-Urartians, in modern terms; V. S.), rather than with the Indo-Europeans. In the mid-12th century B.C. the area witnessed the westward movement of the Phrygians-Mushki, who occupied the Aratsani River Valley and established their own state there. The state of Urartu was their powerful eastern neighbor in the 9th – 8th centuries B.C., but the Urartian kings failed to subjugate the Phrygians-Mushki, who secured their states, though the latter were not as large as the former Hayasa. In their turn, the Phrygians dealt a mortal blow to Urartu in the end of the 8th century B.C., after which power was seized by the Armens, who led an alliance of Phrygian tribes (Manandian 1956)³).

Thus, despite the scarcity and obscurity of evidence, Manandian unreservedly located Hayasa in the Lower Aratsani River Valley. In this way, he was seeking to resolve several problems simultaneously. First, the puzzle of the two Armenian designations was clarified – “Hayq” would be inherited by the Armenians from their indigenous ancestors, and “Armen” from one of the newcomer Phrygian tribes. Although both assumptions were erroneous, as was demonstrated by Diakonov (Diakonov 1983: 157, 172), they provided both names with Armenian origins, which was very important to Armenian identity. Second, while locating Hayasa on the route of Mushki movement rather than far away from it (as other scholars had done), Manandian made it easier for the proto-Armenians to be thought to have borrowed the name “Hayq”. Third, the very fact that proto-Armenians obtained both names before their arrival in the territory of Urartu made it possible to downplay the Urartians’ role in their formation and to assume that the Armenians were a distinct community that had already been formed by the time of their resettlement in Urartu. To this end, Manandian presented the arrival of the Mushki and the Armens in Urartu as a mass that swamped and perhaps even pushed away the local Urartian population. Fourthly, the incorporation of the Hayasa Kingdom into the Armenian past made it possible to extend the very beginnings of the Armenian state back into the Late Bronze Age. Hence, the Armenians were represented as a people, who had had their own state from their very birth. As a result, the history of the Armenians and their state began several centuries before they were mentioned in the famous Behistun inscription, and the Urartians played but a subsidiary role in that development.

This approach was shared by G. Kapantsian, the first Armenian researcher to

provide Hayasa with a crucial role in Armenian history. He was straightforward, while arguing that Hayasa were the key to the very roots of the Armenian state: “the historical process of the formation of the contemporary Armenians and their early political bodies continued ... for a long time, at least from the mid-2nd Millennium B.C., when a double ‘kingdom’ Hayasa-Azzi was known” (Kapantsian 1947: 6)⁴). Kapantsian located Hayasa between the upper courses of the Euphrates, Çoroh and Arax Rivers, i.e., much further north than Manandian believed it was, but much closer to the area where it is located by contemporary experts in the field.

Following the prominent Soviet linguist, the Academician N. Ya. Marr⁵), he rejected the idea of the “homeland” and did his best in order to represent the Armenians as an indigenous population in Eastern Asia Minor. To attempt to accomplish that, he divorced the Armenian language from the Indo-European family of languages and claimed that, at its very basis, this language was closely connected with the local languages of Asia Minor. If it shared any Indo-European elements at all, they were only an insignificant admixture (Kapantsian 1947: 163-170, 1975: 206-242)⁶). That is why he declared Hayasa the “cradle of the Armenians”. At the same time, like Manandian, he made every effort to play down any Urartian contribution to the formation of the Armenian people. Instead, he considered it very important to emphasize their bonds with the Hittites and the Hurrians. While discussing the fate of the Hittites after their state had collapsed, he assumed that the great bulk of them were incorporated into the Armenian people. Later on, various groups, who lived in the Upper Euphrates area and in Urartu, were Armenized as well. When it came to the Mushki, Kapantsian, like contemporary Georgian scholars, identified them with the Moschi and called them a Georgian tribe. He did his best to divorce them from the Phrygian world but recognized that they had been partly assimilated by the Armenians.

Thus, Kapantsian argued that the Armenian community had formed before the proto-Armenians moved to Urartu, and he called a group from the 7th – 3rd centuries B.C. the “new Armenians”. He depicted extensive Armenian movements during the latter period to the southeast, east, and northeast, where they assimilated various groups, which they met along their way. While noting that at that time the Armenians lived in different states, Kapantsian was fascinated with the Armenian ability to assimilate others and demonstrated that, by the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C., they had managed to spread their language from Northern Syria to the Kura River and from Eastern Cappadocia to the Lake Urmia basin. He pointed out that the Armenization of Urartu was completed by the end of the 3rd century B.C. and that the Armenians had already arrived in the Ararat Valley by the 4th century B.C. (Kapantsian 1947: 159-162, 1956: 267-327, 1975: 135). At the same time, he recognized that while in Urartu the Armenians were deeply affected by Urartian culture and Hurrian-Urartian language (Kapantsian 1947: 209-233).

The intensely emotional message of the Hayasa concept was expressed by Kapantsian in the conclusion of his book, where he identified its territory with Lesser Armenia and complained that in 1915 the Armenians were slaughtered by

the Turks in that very region of the “Armenian cradle”. He also emphasized the great role of statehood, as the most important factor in Armenian ethnic consolidation (Kapantsian 1947: 236, 238). Purity of language or blood was not a problem for him, and he used to write of the mixed nature of the Armenian language and of the numerous non-Armenian groups that were Armenized and incorporated into the Armenian people (for example, see Kapantsian 1975: 131-135, 206-242).

To evaluate Kapantsian’s conception, one has to bear in mind the following things. First, it was aimed at Nazi propaganda, which called the Armenians newcomer people, alien to the Caucasus. Second, the book was completed during the time when Soviet authorities openly supported Armenian and Georgian claims on Turkish lands, and rumors were being disseminated about a possible war with Turkey. In the late 1930s, the Armenian writer, Axel Bakunts, was arrested and then died in jail. This was because in one of his stories he complained about the scarcity of land in Armenia and hinted at the vast formerly Armenian lands appropriated by Turkey (Suny 1983: 60). If he had lived ten years longer, he might have been rewarded. In November 1945, the Soviet government issued a decree ordering the repatriation of Armenians from abroad. Immediately after that, for a whole year Yerevan broadcast appeals to the Armenian Diaspora to come back to the “historical homeland”, and put forward irredentist ideas of unification with the territories once appropriated by Turkey. At their Conference, held in San Francisco in June 1945, the Armenian National Council in the USA demanded that the territories “violently seized by Turkey” should be transferred to Soviet Armenia (Phillips 1989: 135-136), and this was reported in the major Soviet newspaper, “Pravda” (Sozdanie 1945; Grant 1991: 45). All of this was a clear sign that the campaign had been launched from Moscow. The Armenians had sincere hopes that Stalin would be able to return to them their ancient lands (Dekmejian 1997: 416-417). This inspired both the Armenian Diaspora abroad and the Armenian Church in Armenia. Indeed, during 1945-1946 the Soviet government placed strong pressure on Turkey in order to take back the Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin provinces, and Viacheslav Molotov first told the Turkish ambassador in Moscow about that on June 7, 1945. Only the intervention of the USA destroyed these plans (Matossian 1962: 166-167; Sarkisyanz 1975: 329; Kuniholm 1980: 267-268, 287, note 216; Suny 1993: 166-177, 225, 1997: 367-368; Barsegov 1997: 57).

A mass repatriation of Armenians to the Armenian SSR took place after 1946. Together with anti-Turkish attitudes, anti-Iranian feelings were stirred up, which were openly expressed in Armenian historical publications from the 1940s (Iskandarian, Arutiunian 1999: 150-152). It was in this environment that a book entitled “Hayasa – the cradle of the Armenians” could not but have an extreme propagandistic effect. In the 1940s, Armenian scholars were enthusiastically searching for Armenian ancestors, most of all on the Armenian plateau (Barkhudarian, Khudaverdian 1983: 77). At that time, the future Academician, B. Arakelian, published a booklet in which he attacked the migration hypothesis as

“bourgeois and reactionary” and argued that the Armenians were an indigenous people rooted in Hayasa. Following Kapantsian, he maintained that the Armenian language had nothing in common with the Indo-European languages (Arakelian 1948. For that, see Astourian 1994: 50).

CHAPTER 4

THE VALUE OF INDIGENOUS ANCESTORS

Meanwhile, in 1945-1946 Armenia witnessed the rapid growth of nationalism, caused by intensive repatriation as well as by hopes for a positive resolution of the territorial issue. This alarmed the Soviet authorities, and measures were taken against it. From the fall of 1947 until 1953, Armenian nationalism was the target of a political and ideological campaign. Among other things, the latter was aimed at the “romanticization of the historical past of Armenia”. In order to demonstrate the real state of affairs to the Armenians and to warn them against further “romanticization”, the 125th anniversary of the unification of Armenia with Russia was celebrated in February 1953 (Matossian 1962: 167-169; Sarkisyanz 1975: 330). It had to be clear to the Armenians that their homeland was within Soviet Armenia, and they had to cast aside all dreams of the lands beyond its borders. Simultaneously, some Turkish scholars came out against the Armenian and Georgian claims for the lands in Eastern Turkey. They did their best to prove the indigenous status of the Turks in Anatolia; in particular, some of them went so far as to talk of the “Hittite Turks” (Kirzioglu 1953: III, XIV-XVI; Engin 1958: 95. For that see, Yevgeniev 1963: 78-84).

It was at this time that the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR published a two-volume book entitled “History of the Armenian people” completed by the Yerevan historians (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951). Its unique feature was that the authors did not restrict themselves to the artificial republican borders established by the Soviets, as was common for similar “Histories” of the many other peoples of the USSR. They did their best to analyze the historical process that embraced the entire Armenian plateau, including Southern Transcaucasia. In their view, the Hayasa tribal alliance played a crucial role in the formation of the Armenian people. It was emphasized that Hayasa was the only country that had secured independence and avoided the fate of other lands conquered by Urartu. Moreover, while having incorporated its southern neighbors, the “Armens”, Hayasa began to annex the Urartian borderlands and to assimilate the natives. Thus, just after the Armenian people were born, they not only became independent but also proved to be successful conquerors. They inherited the self-designation the “Hay” from no less than the freedom-loving Hayasa alliance. The Armenians were also depicted as suitable heirs and successors of Urartu’s cultural traditions (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951: 24-25). All of these ideas sounded

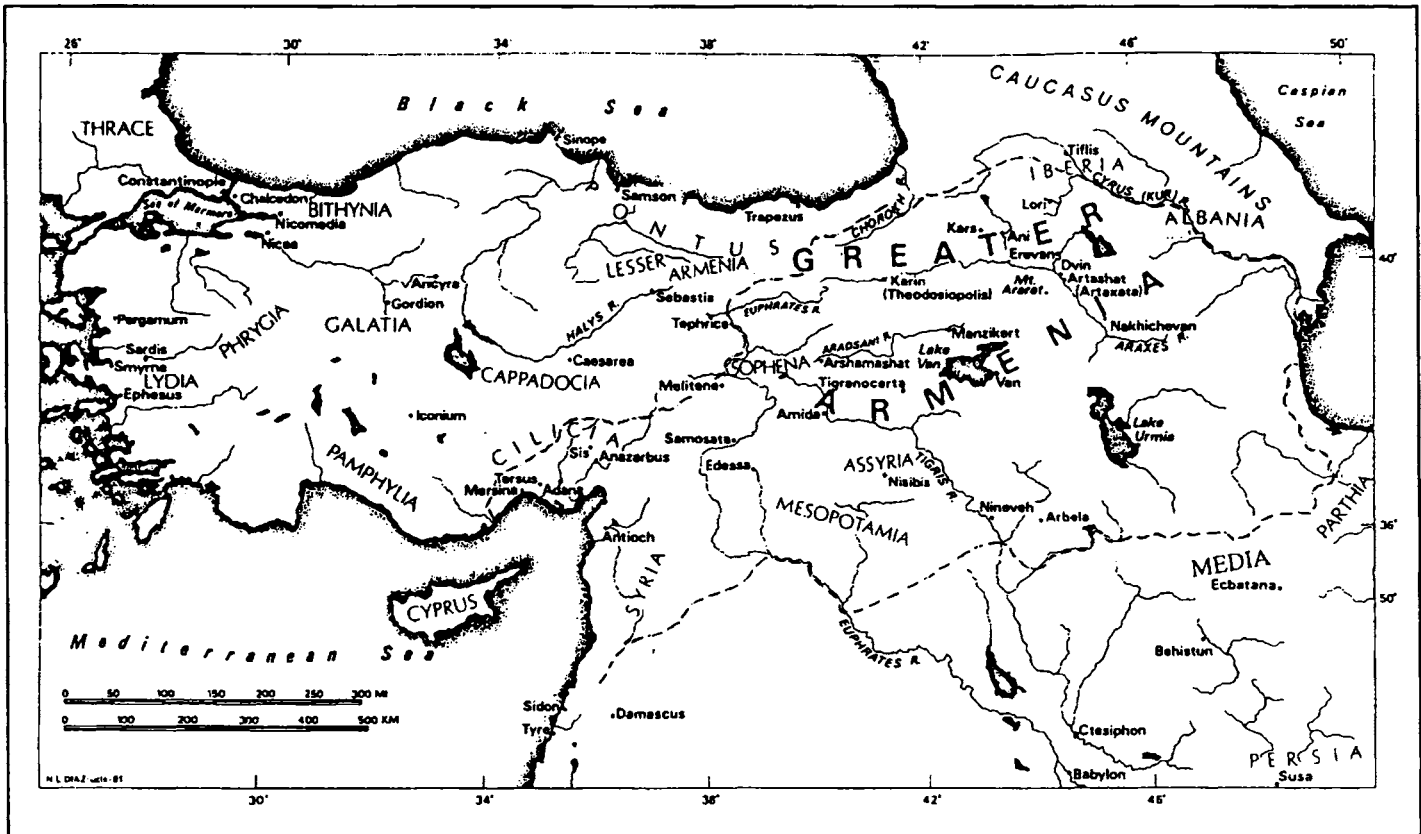
encouraging and provided new self-esteem to a people, who had experienced recent genocide and lost the great bulk of their former territory.

Among the first Armenian states, the authors considered the Ayrarat kingdom, established in the territory of the future Armenian republic in the Middle Arax River Valley in 316 B.C. Its ruler belonged to the noble Eruandid family, whose members governed the 18th satrapy of the Achaemenian Empire and were already known to Xenophon in 401-400 B.C. (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951: 32). All of this provided the Armenian republic with a breath-taking past and permitted the Armenians to feel like a truly indigenous people.

The next glorious period was linked with Greater Armenia, which replaced the province of the Seleucid state and grew into an independent state under king Artashes I in 189 B.C. However, true glory was brought to this state by Tigran the Great (95-55 B.C.), who enormously extended its borders. In particular, he annexed the lands of Artsakh and Utik, between the Kura and Arax Rivers (map 3). After Armenia had incorporated the vast territories inhabited by various people in the 2nd – 1st centuries B.C., it became a huge empire and, like other early states of this sort, had to be very heterogeneous in terms of both language and culture. However, referring to Strabo, the authors maintained that all its inhabitants spoke the very same Armenian language (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951: 35, 38). Obviously, this could be used to prove the excellent assimilative qualities of the Armenian language and provide it special status. Meanwhile, the enormous empire did not last long and shrank after 66 B.C. (map 4).

The Armenia of the Arsacid period (1st – 3rd centuries A.D.) was represented as an entirely independent kingdom, which bravely resisted the numerous attacks of powerful enemies – Rome and Persia (map 5). Yet, the enemies proved to be stronger, and Greater Armenia was first partitioned in A.D. 387, after which it was never able to regain its former lands. In A.D. 428, the Armenian state was finally abolished, and since then the very existence of the Armenian people – rather than their statehood – was at stake. Later history was depicted as a permanent restless struggle waged in the form either of revolts or refusal to accept Zoroastrianism or guerilla warfare. At the same time, the early medieval period was characterized not only by resistance to foreign oppression but also by outstanding cultural achievements, in particular, the invention of the alphabet and the flourishing of Armenian literature and architecture in the 5th – 7th centuries A.D. In brief, the early medieval period was represented as a time of both unparalleled heroism and extraordinary cultural success.

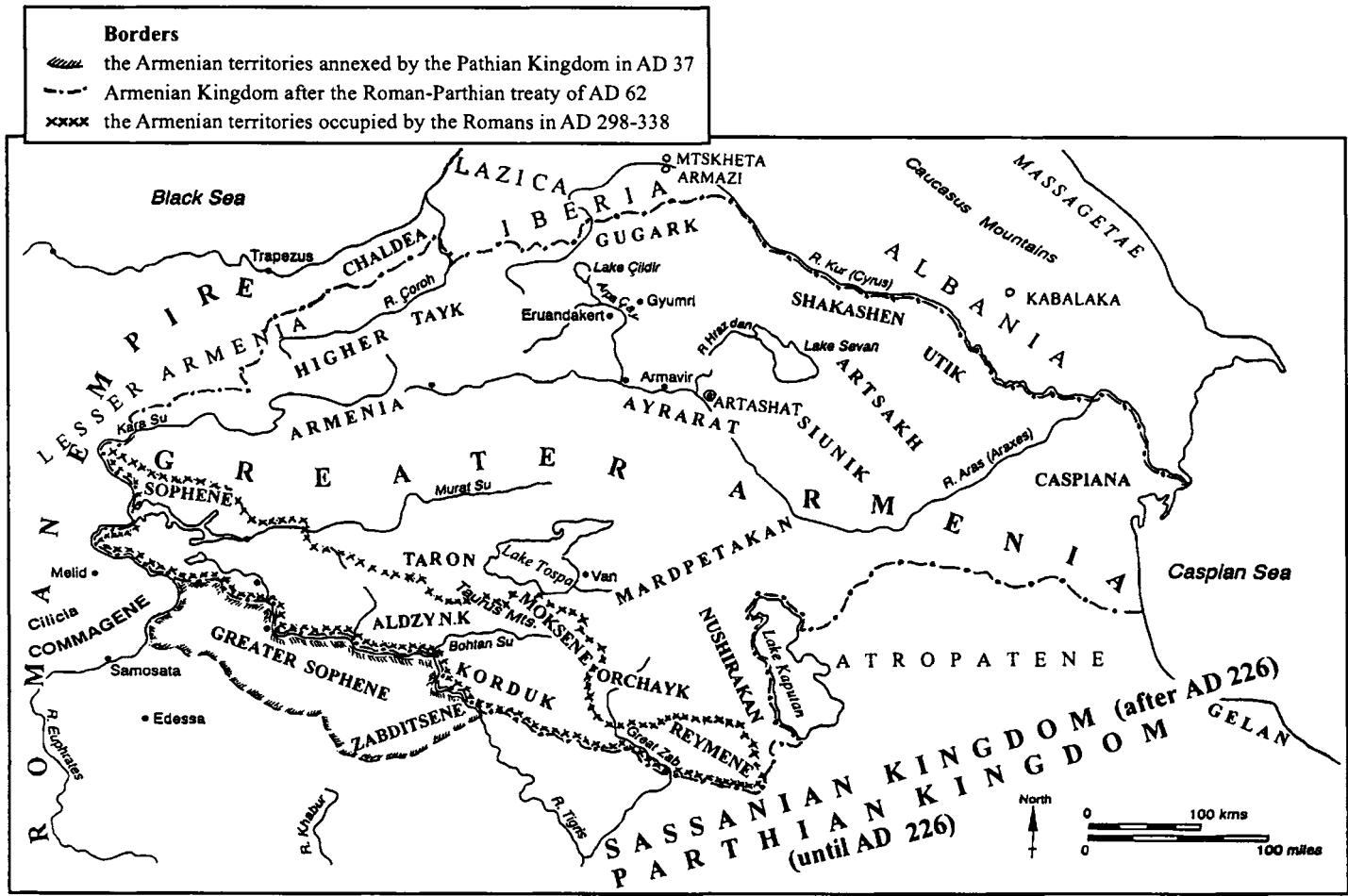
At the same time, the introduction of Christianity was noted only in passing, and the issue of monophysitism was omitted altogether. Caucasian Albania and its lands were hardly mentioned, either. The authors located the Albanians in the territory of Soviet Azerbaijan, and called them the true friends of the Armenians. All of this was of concern to the Azeris, who were represented as their direct successors (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951: 31). Nothing was said of the Khachen principality, and the authors did their best to avoid discussing the territorial issue.



Map 3 Armenia under Tigran the Second (after Yeremian 1952 and Redgate 1998)



Map 4 Armenia after 66 B.C. (after Yeremian 1952)



True, the textbook was supplemented with a set of historical maps compiled by S. T. Yeremian (Yeremian 1952). On these maps, the right bank of the Kura River, with the provinces of Gogarene, Sakasene, Artsakh, Utik, Siunik and Caspiana (Paytakaran) was, since the 2nd century B.C., included in Greater Armenia. Or, to put it another way, territories that constitute contemporary Georgia and Azerbaijan were shown as parts of the early Armenian state. True, the maps also demonstrated that Armenia had lost most of them after A.D. 387, when they were incorporated into Iberia and Caucasian Albania (map 6).

Karabagh was referred to only in respect of the anti-Turkic liberation movement led by Davit Beq in the 18th century and was presented as one of the most important centers of Armenian resistance (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951: 247, 252-255) (maps 7-8). The authors did not fail to emphasize the establishment of a Russian-Armenian military alliance as early as the 10th century (Arakelian, Ioannisian 1951: 163). In this way, they obviously met contemporary ideological demands, which stressed the obligation to appreciate early friendly relations between the Russians and other ethnic groups in the USSR and their wholesome role (for that, see Tillett 1969).

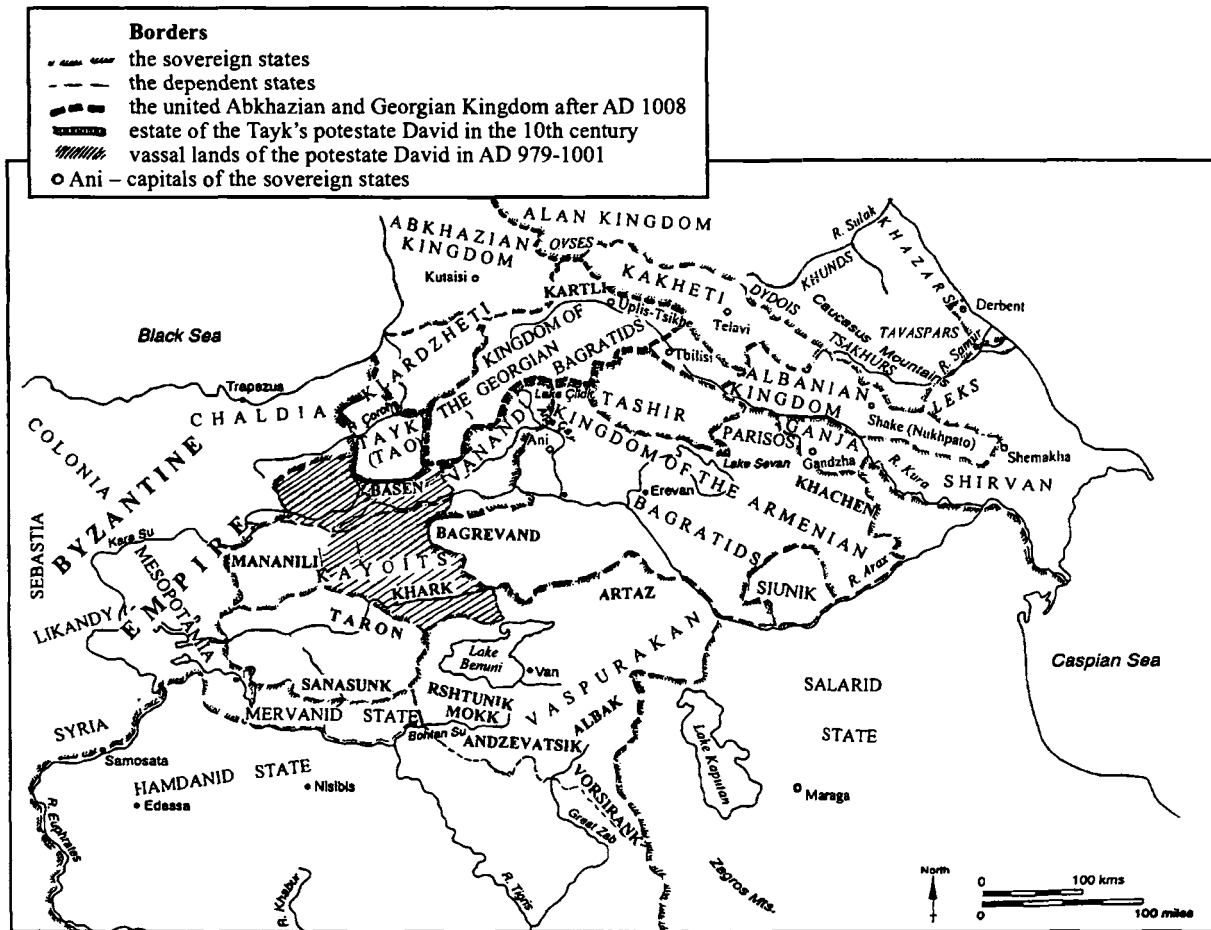
Archaeological data played a significant role in building up an image of the remote Armenian past and culture among the Armenians. An outstanding discovery was made in 1950 in the South-Eastern outskirts of Yerevan, where archaeologists found a cuneiform inscription reporting the building of the fortress of Erebuni by the Urartian King Argishti in 782 B.C. As a result, Yerevan was declared one of the oldest cities in the world, and its 2,750th anniversary was celebrated in September 1968. The Armenians were especially proud that Yerevan has been established 30 years earlier than Rome (Arutiunian et al. 1968: 12-13; Oganessian 1968: 5; Akopian 1977: 9). At the same time, there are still not any substantial cultural residues of the Urartian epoch in Yerevan; only a few occasional finds remind us of those days (Oganessian 1968: 59-60).

Since the 1950s, the primary expert in Armenian ethnogenesis was Suren T. Yeremian (1908-1992). He was born in Tbilisi to an industrial worker's family, and, due to that, was granted a good education. In 1928-1931, he was trained at the Historical-Philological Faculty of Yerevan State University, which survived by chance the era of the persecution of followers of historical disciplines. Then, in 1932-1935 he was a post-graduate student at the Institute of Caucasian Studies in the Transcaucasian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Tbilisi) and, finally, was awarded a post-doctoral scholarship at the Institute of Oriental Studies in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Leningrad). The best Soviet scholars, Ya. A. Manandian, N. Ya. Marr, V. V. Struve, I. A. Orbeli, I. A. Djavakhishvili, were among his tutors. Under their supervision he became a well-trained researcher, an expert in many Caucasian, Eastern and Western languages.

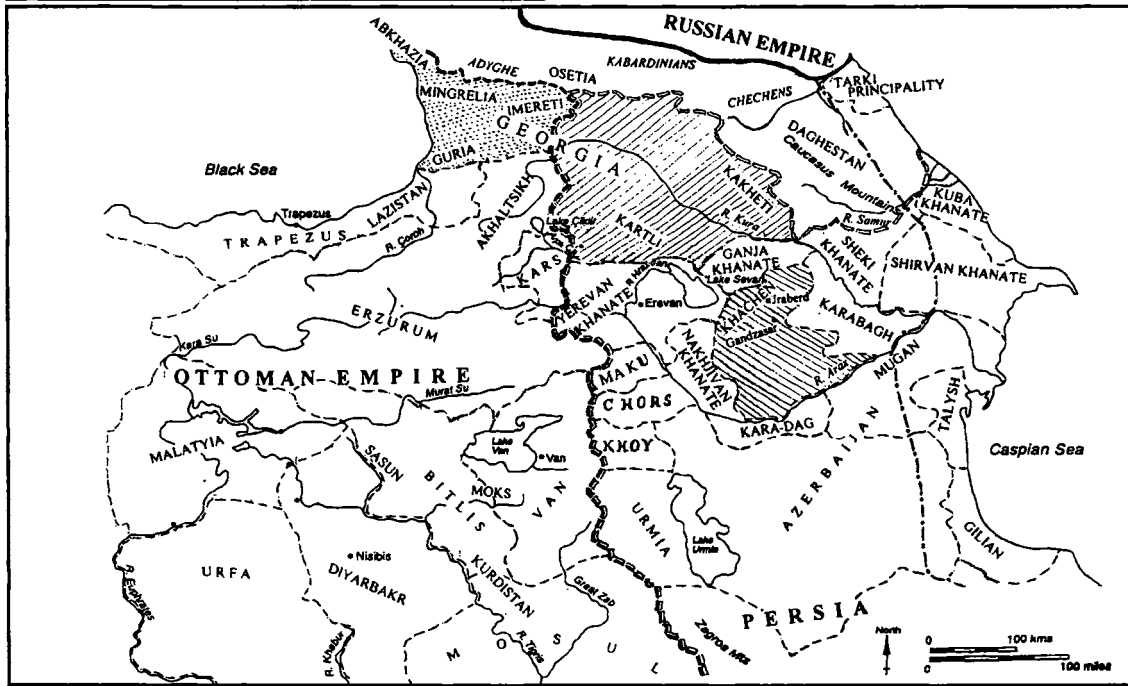
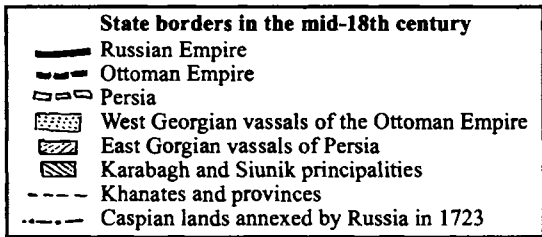
After graduation, he was affiliated with the Institute of Oriental Studies in Leningrad (1938-1941) where he focused on the history of Armenia and Caucasian Albania. In 1941, he was invited to Yerevan, where the new Institute of the History



Map 6 Armenia in the 5th – 7th centuries A.D. (after Yeremian 1952)



Map 7 Armenia by the beginning of the 11th century A.D. (after Yeremian 1952)



Map 8 Armenia and adjacent countries in the early 18th century (after Yeremian 1952)

of Material Culture of the Armenian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR after 1942) has been just opened. He was appointed scientific secretary of the Institute, and, soon after, he was an acting director there (1941-1942). After 1945, he was chairman of one of the departments within the Institute of History, and after the defense of his doctoral thesis (1953) he became the director of that Institute (1953-1959). In 1953, he was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, and an Academician ten years after. In 1965-1968, he was an Academician-secretary of the Social Sciences Division and a member of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR.

For all his life, Yeremian studied the ethnogenesis and history of the Armenian people. He generously shared his knowledge with his students; he gave lecture courses on the history of the Armenian people first at Leningrad State University, then at Yerevan State University, the Armenian Pedagogical Institute and some other schools in Yerevan. Furthermore, Yeremian was one of the first Soviet experts in historical cartography. From the 1930s, he was responsible for the general mapping of the early history of Armenia and the Caucasus, producing maps intended for standard schooling in the USSR. He was also one of the authors of the first Marxist textbook on the history of the Armenian people, for secondary school students. In brief, he was very influential both in the field of history and in historical education in Soviet Armenia (Babajanian, Sogomonian 1984; Tiratsian 1988).

Yeremian was an ardent advocate of the autochthonist concept of Armenian ethnogenesis. He began Armenian history with the Hayasa and argued that the Armenian ancestors had nothing to do with Phrygia. In this respect, the Mushki were of no value to him, and he generously gave them to the Georgians. At the same time, in contrast to Kapantsian, he had no doubt that Hayasa's inhabitants spoke an Indo-European language. He argued that Indo-Europeans had lived in Asia Minor and the Armenian plateau from time immemorial. The origin of the Hayasa people was not a major issue for him. What was of great importance was that the Armenian people were created, with their assistance, in the territory of the Armenian plateau itself. This provided the Armenians with the status of a truly indigenous people (Yeremian 1951: 42).

Why was the Armenian language able to expand very early over vast areas? Yeremian taught that in socio-economic terms the tribe of the "Hays" was the most advanced among all the subjects of Urartu. True, they had to struggle against the Urartian kings, whose will they violated while Armenizing a great many local inhabitants. This he maintained while giving no explanation as to why the language of the subjugated Hays rather than that of their Urartian masters won the final victory.

The next period in the early history of the Armenian people was colored by the invasion of the Iranian-speaking Scythians. Yeremian recognized that they played a significant role in Armenian ethnogenesis. Following Kapantsian (Kapantsian 1947:

149), he pointed out that one of the earliest Armenian states, named Armina-Shupria (7th century B.C.), was ruled by King Paroyr, who was of Saka origin⁷⁾. Then, the new state of Eruanduni with its "Armenian-Median" dynasty emerged next door. This state, named Armina, had grown up naturally at the basis of the state of Urartu and began to dominate the region after Urartu's downfall. There was no question of a Median invasion at all, in Yeremian's conception. This made it possible to implement the Armenization of the local population easily and rapidly before Persian rule was established there. Besides, Yeremian argued that the Lake Van basin had already become Armenian by the 6th century B.C. rather than in the 2nd century B.C. under King Artashes I. Finally, like Kapantsian before him, Yeremian paid much attention to the rapid Armenian assimilation of all the neighboring people, in particular the numerous Scythians and Sarmatians in Transcaucasia (Yeremian 1951; 1952).

In fact, the Eruandid dynasty had Persian roots and emerged only in the 4th century B.C. (El'chibekian 1971) or, at the very least, by the end of the 5th century (Garsoian 1997a: 46-47). Yeremian acknowledged that the Eruandids originated from the Matiene area west of Lake Urmia, where the most important Median and Persian dynasties came from. He even recognized that the very name Eruand had an Iranian root. Yet, he argued that the Armenians together with the Medes and Persians had made a military alliance aimed at Assyria and Urartu, that the Armenian troops were led by Eruaz Eruanduni, who came to the Urartu throne after its capital was taken, that he took the name of Rusa and was the last to hold the title of King of Urartu. After his death the country received its new name, Armina (Yeremian 1951: 46).

To put it another way, in Yeremian's view, the Armenians were the true indigenous people of the Armenian plateau; they were the bearers of state organization from the turn of the 6th century B.C. and were the direct successors of Urartu; by that time they had assimilated all the rest of the Urartian population, who shifted to the Armenian language. Thus, the formation of the Armenian people and the emergence of the Armenian state were pushed far back into history and preceded the establishment of the Persian Empire. From this point, the Persians became invaders, who violated the natural development of the Armenian ethnopolitical process. The latter was restored only in the 2nd century B.C. when continuing Armenization embraced the Ararat Valley and some areas to the north of it. Yeremian maintained that the ethnogenetic process was finally completed by the 2nd – 1st centuries B.C. when Greater Armenia emerged, being populated by one and the same people with one and the same language (Yeremian 1951: 49-50).

True, this idea was not without puzzles. A thoughtful reader might ask what Armenian state was in question during the pre-Persian period if, according to the author, even during the Achaemenian epoch Armenia was still populated by stateless societies; what was meant by linguistic homogeneity in Greater Armenia as it rapidly embraced a vast territory populated by numerous groups of different origins and linguistic affiliations; what was meant by a uniform language if local

Armenian groups maintained their vernaculars even down to the 6th – 7th centuries A.D., and the literary “Grabar” language was popular only among the nobility. Yet, in the Soviet environment of late Stalinism the advantages of this concept were much more important than its shortcomings. Indeed, the Armenians turned out to be a truly indigenous people and the bearers of state organization in the very early days, which was a crucial pre-condition of their survival as a distinct people.

Yeremian’s concept was so timely that it was advocated by the “Kommunist” newspaper, an organ of the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party. In an article published there, Yeremian put special emphasis on the role of the Ararat Valley which, in his words, became the “attractive center of Armenian lands” where the political and cultural center of all-Armenian importance had already emerged by Hellenistic times (Yeremian 1953). This image clarified the role that the Soviet Armenians wanted to provide for the Armenian SSR in order to make it attractive to new repatriates.

The Armenian historical profession was greatly affected by what happened in 1965 when, for the first time in Soviet history, the Armenians openly demonstrated their attitude towards the genocide of 1915. To express their grief in response to its 50th anniversary, thousands of Armenians filled Yerevan’s streets; some of them demanding the taking back of Armenian lands as if they had been illegally appropriated by Turkey (Suny 1983: 78). From that time, it became especially important for Armenian historians to argue that the Armenians were the first settlers of Asia Minor and the Armenian plateau, to extend the roots of their state far onto the past, and to demonstrate that from the late 1st Millennium B.C. until 1915 the Armenians were the dominant majority on the Armenian plateau (for example, see Akopian 1968). By doing this, they not only legitimized their right to independent political development but also repulsed the Turkish historians, who refused to recognize Armenians as an indigenous population which had lived on the Armenian plateau from time immemorial (Zulalian 1970; Areshian 1992a: 26).

Yeremian’s concept met these requirements perfectly well. From the late 1960s, he did his best to search for earlier Armenian states. He put Arme-Shupria on this list. This area was situated beside the southwestern Urartian border; it broke away from Urartu toward the end of the 8th century B.C. Armenian speakers migrated from there and neighboring Nairi-Khubushkia to Urartian territory for decades. Yeremian represented Arme-Shupria as one of the most advanced states in the region, which was run by rulers of Scythian origin nearly from the beginning of the 7th century B.C. One of them was Paroyr, who took part in the taking of Nineveh, and became an independent king of Armenia after the fall of Assyria in 612 B.C. Yeremian did not omit the Eruanduni Dynasty, and called it Armenian without any reserve. He put it at the head of Urartu and made it a contemporary of Paroyr, whose kingdom it had appropriated by the turn of the 6th century B.C. As a result, an Armenian kingdom with its capital in Tushpa (later on Armavir) replaced Urartu in an evolutionary way without any bloodshed. The Persians and the Greeks called it “Armina” or “Armenia”, and the Akkadians kept associating it with Urartu.

The “Ararat” of the famous prophecy of Jeremiah (593 B.C.) was none other than “Urartu” in Hebrew transliteration (Yeremian 1968).

Thus, Yeremian’s concept of the emergence of an Armenian people now appeared as follows. He called Hayasa-Azzi of the 15th – 13th centuries B.C. “Initial Armenia” and located it in the region of historical Lesser Armenia, i.e. west of Erzurum and the Kara-su River. At this time, he saw it populated by the Mushki, or “proto-Armens”/Urumeans. It was these tribes, who, together with some newcomers from inland Asia Minor, moved southeast by 1165 B.C. and settled between the Lower Aratsani River and the Upper Tigris River, where the historical lands of Sophene and Arzanene were situated. As a result of resettlement, the “Kingdom of Mushki” emerged, which was called Arme/Urme later on. Whereas Yeremian treated Hayasa as a homogeneous tribal society, he associated the “Kingdom of Mushki” with an alliance of different tribes, within whose borders the newcomer Arims began to merge with the Hurrians-Urartians. After it lost the war, Arme joined Urartu in 773-714 B.C., and in 673-653 B.C. it was ruled by Assyria. In the meantime, during the 8th – 7th centuries B.C., the Armenian tribes gradually flooded Urartu and were intensively assimilating its population, while Urartu was in decline. This was the concluding stage of the formation of the Armenian people. At the beginning of the 6th century B.C., the Armenians together with the Medes had gained victory over Urartu and put an end to the Urartian ruling dynasty.

Yeremian initially published this thesis in 1958, after which he sharpened it in his later works (for example, see Yeremian 1970). Instructively, all these articles were published in Armenian. Only an article of 1970 was supplemented by a short Russian abstract. Obviously, the author tried to avoid any criticism by Russian experts in the field. Indeed, Diakonov considered it senseless to try to reconcile the “Hayasa” and “Mushki” theories (Diakonov 1968: 224-226).

This view was disappointing for another reason as well. The meaning of the victory over Urartu was unclear because, as we remember, Yeremian claimed that an Armenian dynasty had ruled there successfully since the second quarter of the 7th century B.C. In Yeremian’s view, it had commenced the continuous Armenian state tradition. Thus, the well-known historical victory of Media over Urartu in 590B.C. (Russell 1997: 28) apparently damaged Yeremian’s concept, and he did his best to get rid of it.

Anyway, the crucial points of the final version of Yeremian’s concept were, first, the establishment of a true Armenian state by the end of the 7th century B.C., and second, the discovery of the “center of gravity of the Armenian people” in the Middle Arax River Valley (the Ararat Valley) where the contemporary Republic of Armenia is situated. In fact, the arrival of the proto-Armenian population in the territory of contemporary Armenia was the result of the intentional re-settlement policy of the Urartian kings (for that, see Diakonov 1968: 233). Notwithstanding, the idea of such a “center of gravity” was by no means a natural outcome of this concept. Indeed, the latter argued of the emergence of the first independent Armenian state in all the territory of former Urartu. Yeremian’s view was also

characterized as straightforward autochthonism. There was no question of a Phrygian migration, and the appearance of the Mushki was not explained at all. It is no accident that in his encyclopedia entry on the Armenians, Yeremian argued that the first historical evidence of them had already appeared by the 3rd – 2nd Millennia B.C. (Yeremian 1980). In fact, after an early Phrygian inscription by Mita, the King of Mushki, dated to the late 8th century B.C., and an even earlier Luwian hieroglyphic inscription of another king of Mushki were discovered, the Mushki's identity with Phrygians, not only Indo-Europeans in general, was finally proven (Khazaradze 1978, 1988)⁸.

In the early 1980s, Yeremian's articles appeared in the "Kommunist" newspaper once again. Obviously, the matter of the indigenous status of the Armenians had become a hot issue. While reviewing the main points of his concept, Yeremian made every effort to confirm it with the new archaeological and linguistic data at hand. He put forward quite arbitrary arguments: that a homogeneous culture covered the whole Armenian plateau in prehistory (this cannot be proven, for the Armenian plateau is still poorly known archaeologically; V. Sh.), that a proto-Armenian language had already developed there by the turn of the 4th Millennium B.C. and that an "anthropological type of Caucasian race, which is best of all represented by the Armenians" was born there (Yeremian 1981a). At this time, Yeremian went so far as to argue that the Armenians, Phrygians and Mushki settled throughout Asia Minor in the 3rd Millennium B.C., and that the earliest Armenian "kingdom of Melid" flourished there in the 12th – 8th centuries B.C., i.e. it was much older than Urartu. Yeremian called the population of this kingdom Armenian rather than proto-Armenian (Yeremian 1984). This is how the Armenians turned into the eternal people, one of the oldest people on earth.

Thus, Yeremian's concept had to provide the Armenian indigenous status with historical arguments; one of its weakest points was that it was unable to explain the emergence of the Armenian language. Indeed, in the 1950s-1960s Armenian scholars already had no doubt that the Armenian language belonged to the Indo-European family of languages, and Kapantsian's hypothesis looked obsolete. Thus, an autochthonist concept had to prove that the Indo-European languages were widespread in Anatolia from time immemorial. An Armenian linguist, G. B. Djahukian, did his best to meet this demand. While discussing the "double nature" of the Armenian language, Kapantsian found only slight Indo-European traces in it; instead, Djahukian represented the Armenian language as one of the most ancient Indo-European languages. Although nothing but a few personal and place names survived from the Hayasa language, Djahukian found it possible to include it into an Anatolian group of early Indo-European languages. He argued that the Armen newcomers merged easily with the Hayasa people for the very reason that they spoke a closely related language⁹). The secret of how he managed to relate the Hayasan language to Indo-European ones becomes clear from one of his works, where the Urartian and Hurrian languages are identified as "Indo-European-like" (Djahukian 1964: 94. Also see Djahukian 1967a: 50)¹⁰.

While surveying the early history of the Indo-Europeans and their movements, Djahukian shared the view that in the 2nd Millennium B.C. the proto-Armenians lived in the Balkans side by side with the Thracian-Phrygians, and then moved to Asia Minor with them. There the proto-Armenians first assimilated the Hayasa people and then the Hittites and Urartians. This concept secured a special role for the Hayasa people, as they helped first to make the Armenian ancestors the true indigenous inhabitants, and second to provide them with the Indo-European language from the very beginning. After this claim has been made, one might agree that the Armenian ancestors arrived partly from the Balkans (Mushki), and were partly represented by the Armenized Hittites, Urartians and Hurrians. True, the Hittites were certainly Indo-Europeans, but Djahukian went even further and tried to associate the Hurrians and Urartians with the latter as well (Djahukian 1967a: 50, 1967b: 70).

It would be even easier to provide the Armenians with indigenous ancestors in Asia Minor if one could demonstrate that the Armenians were in contact with the Semites from the earliest times. In order to do that, one had to search for early Semitic loan words in the Armenian language. In the 1970s, the Armenian linguist, N. A. Mkrtchian, bent all his efforts to fulfilling this task (Mkrtchian 1970, 1979). However, in his works enthusiasm prevailed over accuracy, and, according to his fair critics, he failed to find any reliable evidence of direct Armenian-Akkadian contacts (Djahukian 1980: 96-101; Diakonov 1981b). Djahukian tried to solve the same problem with the help of a more sophisticated approach (Djahukian 1980) but failed as well (Diakonov 1981b: 78, note 14). At the same time, he demonstrated that there were no early Indo-European place names in the suggested Indo-European homeland in Asia Minor (Djahukian 1980: 115).

Meanwhile, in the 1970s the well-known Soviet linguists, V. V. Ivanov and T. V. Gamkrelidze, began to argue that Asia Minor was the homeland of the Indo-European languages (Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984). Their approach greatly encouraged and added to the enthusiasm of those who tried to represent the Armenian plateau as the pristine and everlasting Armenian homeland (Barkhudarian, Khudaverdian 1983: 78; Yeremian 1984). In particular, Djahukian began to argue that the Armenian language was widespread on the Armenian plateau even before the 12th century B.C. Being affected by the Ivanov and Gamkrelidze view, he put forward the hypothesis of direct contact between the Armenians and proto-Kartvelians in the beginning of the 2nd Millennium B.C. (Djahukian 1990). At the same time, Armenian archaeologists provided more and more evidence of cultural continuity between Urartu, on the one hand, and the Armenia of the Achaemenian and Hellenistic times on the other hand (Tiratsian 1968).

CHAPTER 5

THE ORIGINS OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE, AND THE ARMENIAN SCHOOL

A course in the history of the Armenian people was introduced into Armenian secondary schools at the end of the 1930s. After that time, it was regularly taught in the Armenian SSR. The course contained the following sections, which surveyed the early history of Armenia and the Armenian people. First, there was a geographical overview of Armenia that gave the physical-geographical and natural features of the entire Armenian plateau, and treated it as the true homeland of the Armenians and their ancestors. The next section dealt with the regional evolution of human culture, beginning with the Palaeolithic and continuing up to the Early Iron Age. This section was based heavily on archaeological data and the Marxist concept of social evolution; there was nothing specifically Armenian in that. After that, the reader was informed of the existence of the ancient peoples and states in the territory of Armenia. Early political entities and the cultural achievements that were inherited by the Armenians were considered. A special chapter focused on the development of the Armenian people in the course of the 1st Millennium B.C. The chapters that followed discussed the development of the Armenian state, the political relationships of Armenia with her powerful neighbors, the partitioning of Armenia, Armenian struggle against invaders and enslavers, and finally, the development of the Armenian writing system and culture as invaluable resources of Armenian authenticity and identity.

In the meantime, changes in the concept of the formation of the Armenian people caused instructive shifts in emphasis in the respective chapters of the textbook published at different times. Until the late 1940s, students were taught about the eastward migration of their Armenian ancestors, their gradual settlement of the Armenian plateau, their assimilation of earlier inhabitants and the rich cultural heritage received from the latter (Samvelian et al. 1944: 30-31). Later on, the focus shifted to local Anatolian ancestors linked with Hayasa (Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 21) until a tradition emerged to represent the Armenians as the true indigenous inhabitants of the Armenian plateau, who had built the Hayasa tribal alliance (Parsamian et al. 1962: 7, 9; Arakelian et al. 1988: 9, 14. The migration concept was still appreciated only by professor G. Kh. Sarkisian, a disciple of Diakonov. See Nersisian 1980: 17-18, 27-28). From the 1950s, Hayasa occupied a permanent place in the Armenian textbooks as a strong independent tribal alliance

of the late 2nd Millennium B.C. that established a basis for the formation of the Armenian people and provided them with a self-designation (Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 21-22; Parsamian et al. 1962: 7, 10; Nersisian 1980: 27; Arakelian et al. 1988: 9-10, 14). Whereas initially the Armenians were inclined to generously share the Urartian cultural heritage with the Georgians (Samvelian et al. 1944: 30-31; Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 19), later on they began to represent their own ancestors as the only heirs of Urartu. Whereas initially Lesser Armenia of the 6th century B.C. was called the first Armenian state (Samvelian et al. 1944: 32-33, 40), later on, the emphasis shifted to the Armenian political entities of the Urartu era (Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 21; Parsamian et al. 1962: 9), until one of them, Arme-Shupria, was recognized as the “primordial Armenian state”, which was established at the end of the 8th century B.C. (Arakelian et al. 1988: 15). Over the course of time, the emphasis on the ripening of Armenian statehood within Urartu was strengthening. Initially, it was pointed that after the fall of Urartu the Armenian Kingdom was subjugated by Media (Samvelian et al. 1944: 31), then only some dependence on Media was mentioned (Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 23) until this “dependence” turned into an alliance between two equal partners (Parsamian et al. 1962: 10; Nersisian 1980: 30). Curiously, the only source for all these different conclusions was the same evidence from Xenophon.

The Armenian occupation of both the Arax River Valley and the Ararat Valley was initially depicted as a gradual process that took place in the 5th century B.C. (Samvelian et al. 1944: 36). Later on, they began to place an independent Ayrarat kingdom there. Its emergence was first dated to 316 B.C. (Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 29) and, then it was moved to the early 6th century B.C. (Parsamian et al. 1962: 11). Now, the first arrival of the Armenians to the Ararat Valley was associated with the policy of the Urartian kings, who resettled the Armenian-speaking warriors far to the north (Nersisian 1980: 19, 28). The authors of all the textbooks were unanimous in the view that the Armenian language predominated throughout the Armenian plateau from the early 3rd century B.C., that the ethnic unification of all the Armenians commenced with Artashes I, the founder of the Artashesid Dynasty and the Kingdom of Greater Armenia, and was completed by his successor Tigran the Great (Samvelian et al. 1944: 43; Ioannisian, Arakelian 1950: 31-32, 44; Parsamian et al. 1962: 12, 22-23; Nersisian 1980: 36-45; Arakelian et al. 1988: 17-18). Instructively, the textbooks were supplemented with historical maps, which located the northern boundary of both the Artashesid and then the Arsacid states along the Kura River, i.e. encompassed its entire right bank, together with Artsakh and Utik (Samvelian et al. 1944; Yeremian 1952b). It was argued that Armenia had lost these lands only after A.D. 387 when they made up a distinct province of the Persian state.

One another remarkable feature of the Armenian textbooks was how they used the term “Greater Armenia”. The textbooks of the 1940s – 1950s associated it only with the Artashesid state, but it was extended to the Arsacid state as well, later on. The latter usage was manifested by the “Armenian Encyclopedia” published in

1981 (Yeremian 1981b. Also see Arutiunian 1987: 55). A 1950 textbook contained a special paragraph that told of the relationships between Armenia and the Kievan Rus. This was obviously a sign of the times. Neither before nor after did the Armenian author come back to this issue.

Finally, the Soviet Armenian textbooks did their best to avoid discussing religious issues. True, all of them mentioned the adoption of Christianity and proudly told of the building of early Christian churches. Sometimes Armenia was even represented as the first country where Christianity was declared the state religion (Nersisian 1980: 88). Yet, nothing was said of monophysitism or the sharp theological debate involved. And the churches were treated only as a valuable cultural heritage.

Thus, gradually the school textbooks placed more and more emphasis on the deep roots of the Armenian people, "one of the most ancient peoples of the world" (Parsamian et al. 1962: 9); its formation was linked with the Armenian plateau, and the autochthonist theory was more and more appreciated; a hectic search for the earliest "Armenian" states was carried out; the arrival of the Armenian population in the Arax River Valley and the Ararat Valley was extended further and further into the past; the rapid and successful expansion of the Armenian language and its final victory on the Armenian plateau in the 3rd – 1st centuries B.C. were stressed as well. After this time, the whole local population was identified with the Armenians; as a rule, there was no question of any other group in the region, be they newcomers (Jews or Syrians) or indigenous (Albanians) (but see Nersisian 1980: 45). To put it another way, the textbooks imposed an identity upon the pupils based most of all on language and territory. Narratives of the long continuous national-liberation struggle of the Armenian people against various invaders played by no means a minor role, as well. They taught that the continuous struggle for liberation ultimately gained its wonderful fruits, despite the high cost paid.

CHAPTER 6

THE ARMENIZATION OF URARTU: REVISIONIST CONCEPTS

In the meantime, for years the dream of the Armenian people's great past stirred the imaginations of Armenian writers. The well-known Soviet Armenian writer, Gevorg Emin, was building up his own myth of the Armenian past. His essay, entitled "Seven songs of Armenia", was a typical representation of the myth, which combined the glory of the past with bitter recollections of the recent catastrophe and was to help people recover from the shock. Emin re-published his essay several times, updating it with new ideas and material that he picked up from academic and science fiction literature. He was especially attracted by the still mysterious and less-known state of Urartu. Being familiar with it through historical publications, Emin enriched scholarly knowledge with a large share of artistic fantasy. It was in just this representation that the history of Urartu and its relationship with the Armenians was consumed by the general public, who generally avoided reading the rather complicated works of historians.

What did Emin bring to his readers? It was clear from his essay that the Armenians already lived in Eastern Asia Minor before Urartu was established. That is, the earliest historical documents located them in the territory of the future Urartu. The proto-Armenians were represented as indigenous people, who were for some time subjugated by the Urartian kings. While these kings enjoyed military campaigns and other amusements, the Armenian people consolidated to the extent that, for them, it was not difficult to establish their own state immediately after the fall of Urartu (Emin 1967: 6-9). Thus, the Armenians entered history, first as a coherent community, and second running their own state. A language and writing tradition were the third important element of this image of the remote past, and the author did not fail to glorify Matenadaran, the repository of old Armenian manuscripts, as the most valuable treasury of the Armenian people (Emin 1967: 84 ff.; 1970: 107 ff.). In metaphorical language, which the author dished up for his readers, all of this served as important symbols of the eternal nature of the people, their culture and their state.

Ten years after the first edition of his book had come out, the writer enriched it with data from new archaeological discoveries which demonstrated that high cultures had flourished in the region several thousand years before Urartu came into being. He was especially struck by the discovery of early settlements from the 5th –

2nd Millennium B.C., where skillful farmers and metalworkers lived. Yet, an academic interpretation of these findings seemed too modest for him, and he talked of an ancient civilization that flourished before the Flood (Emin 1979: 13-14). True, he avoided discussing the ethnic affiliation of the builders of that civilization, but nothing prevented his readers from their identification with the Armenians, especially because in the new edition of the essay Urartu was treated as an Armenian state founded by an Armenian king (Emin 1979: 14-15).

Later Armenian history was not as successful as the earlier times; many times the Armenians were conquered by their powerful neighbors. They spent 500 years under Ottoman rule, and this long period – terminating with the genocide in 1915 – was presented only in black. The memory of this massacre colored the whole book, providing it with a special flavor: the Turks with their would-be everlasting pan-Turkic ideology were represented as the eternal enemy of the Armenian people. Russia, though, was depicted as their savior from the Turkish yoke and the only dependable ally, who could be relied upon in the future, as well (Emin 1967, 1970, 1979). In brief, Emin's book was the perfect expression of the basic ideas of Armenian nationalism, which did not change much throughout the course of the 20th century (for that, see Suny 1983: 11, 78).

At the time Emin was writing his book, the revisionist stream had already come onto the Armenian historical scene, although until the very late 1970s it looked like a fringe development represented by names which said nothing to specialists. The first was the geologist, Suren Aivazian, who was affiliated with the editorial board of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. He was enthusiastic about linguistics, and while having no philological training at all, forged highly questionable historical constructions and presented them as scholarly theories. In his first of this sort of article, published in the prestigious journal of the Armenian Academy of Sciences, he argued that the Hyksos, who had conquered Egypt in the early 2nd Millennium B.C. and brought the chariot there, were really the Armenians (Aivazian 1962).

His next booklet, of which a small number of copies was published, declared a revolution in Armenian studies. The author was fascinated with the idea of an everlasting Armenian population in Asia Minor, based on Kapantsian's hypotheses. He did his best to represent the Armenians not only as indigenous inhabitants but also as builders of the oldest civilization in the world. He made the reader familiar with some incontestable evidence as if that proved the "existence and the life of the mighty community that provided humanity with the alphabet and the calendar, iron and the chariot. The name of this community was ancient Armenia". This was an everlasting community, and there was no question of its being a complex formation made up of various unrelated components. From the very beginning it occupied the territory of the Armenian plateau. This concept left no room for Urartu, and the author erased it from history without hesitation. For him, Urartu was the same state in the Lake Van region that was called "Hayasa" by the Hittites, "Nairi" by the Assyrians, "Armina" by the Persians, and "Armenia" by the Greeks. Being

fascinated by his own discovery, the author prophesied: “The Armenian ethno-cultural world come to replace the state of Urartu. And this process was inescapable” (Aivazian 1963: 1). The only obstacle along the way was that of the Urartian language, and the author did his best to prove that in fact this language was Armenian. He took advantage of the fact that the phonetics of the Urartian language were even less known – a phenomenon which every specialist, who deals with dead languages, comes across. Having no idea how to work with this sort of material, Aivazian went so far as to reveal the “phonetic correspondence” with the contemporary Armenian language and to identify the Urartian language with the Armenian one. Moreover, he treated Urartian cuneiform as alphabetic writing and argued that the Armenians had invented the alphabet before the Phoenicians (Aivazian 1963).

Demonstrating extraordinary energy, Aivazian managed to popularize all of these “amazing discoveries” in a booklet published in Moscow after a special decision made by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. In this booklet he first made no distinction between Hayasa, Nairi, Urartu and Armenia and considered them one and the same state, which had different names in different eras. Second, he declared Asia Minor the true homeland of the Indo-Europeans, where the Armenians turned out to be the only indigenous inhabitants, who continue on to the present time. Third, he represented the Armenians as the inventors of iron metallurgy, who supplied their neighbors with iron artifacts even as early as the 3rd – 2nd Millennia B.C. Fourth, he claimed that for their ability to produce iron if for no other reason, the Armenians came to be civiliziers and as such managed to settle from Egypt in the southwest to India and China in the east. In the first case, they were known as the Hyksos, and in the second case as the Aryans. Fifth, he presented the Armenians as the inventors of some “hieroglyphic alphabet” by the 17th – 16th centuries B.C. From this perspective, Mesrob Mashtots seemed to be a poor imitator, who picked up a tradition known to the Armenians thousands of years before him. Sixth, as his own achievement, Aivazian mentioned the discovery of would-be Hayasan hieroglyphic inscriptions and astronomic signs at the site of Medzamor, dating to the 20th century B.C. (Aivazian 1967).

Winning no respect from specialists, Aivazian chosen to apply to the general public and in 1969 initiated a discussion of Urartu in the “Garun” journal, a joint organ of the Central Committee of the Armenian Comsomol organization and the Union of Writers of Armenia. This is how the Armenian general public became aware that the state of Urartu had never existed at all. Instead, an Armenian state was developing in its territory for centuries (Aivazian 1969; Ishkhanian 1969).

On their side, Armenian archaeologists had a different opinion of the site at Medzamor, a rich multi-level settlement in the Ararat Valley, where people had lived continuously from the 3rd Millennium B.C. until the 7th century B.C. True, interesting cult and astronomic features were discovered there, but they dated to the 11th – 9th centuries B.C. Of particular note, rock engravings and a single pottery tablet with the same signs were found in Medzamor. Archaeologists agreed that

these were evidence of early writing but, in contrast to Aivazian, they did not dare to decipher them. The site as a whole had nothing to do with Hayasa. It served as one of the centers of the early polity that flourished in Transcaucasia in the pre-Urartu period (Khanzadian, Mkrtchian, Parsamian 1973; Khanzadian 1978).

The famous Soviet archaeologist and expert on Urartian history, Boris B. Piotrovsky¹¹), demonstrated that, in fact, the “Hayasa writing” from Medzamor appeared to be standard Arabic that was incorrectly copied by Aivazian. The same could be said of the “Hayasa” coin discussed by a colleague of Aivazian – it dated to Mongol times. The myth of some oldest “Hayasa writing” was discredited. Nevertheless, it was widely disseminated all over Armenia by the mass media and was even picked up by some professional journals abroad. Piotrovsky was shocked by Aivazian’s ignorance and ambition, but his intervention could not stop the boom initiated by the latter (Piotrovsky 1971).

Aivazian was not embarrassed at all by the critical response of one of the major Soviet scholars, and in 1980 he completed a set of historical maps of Armenia, beginning in 2107 B.C. He not only represented the Armenian people as the most ancient and civilized, but also argued that the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan was an old Armenian land. This project of Aivazian was considered so provocative that it was cancelled (Aivazian 1997: 444-445).

In the meantime, since the late 1960s Armenian writers got more and more interested in the historical fate of the Armenian people, their glory and tragedy, the roots of their culture, and problems of their Diaspora. It is in this context that the pristine Armenian lands and Greater Armenia were recalled, the names of the outstanding Armenian warlords came back from oblivion, and simultaneously an image of an enemy was restored which was more often than not associated with the Muslim Turks. All of this could not but alarm the Azeris, who, on their side, felt threatened by the growing Armenian nationalism. They were even indignant about a monument dedicated to the Nagorny Karabagh people, made by an Armenian sculptor and erected in Stepanakert – indeed, the depicted couple had clear “Armenian faces” and were dressed in Armenian traditional clothes (Aliev 1989b: 29-42).

It seemed that the idea of an everlasting Armenian settlement on the Armenian plateau was appreciated by the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, and Armenian scholars were obliged to prove the identity of the early Armenians with the Urartians. Initially, this was manifested in the struggle against the Turkish historians, who did their best to disprove this identification as having a clear political connotation (for that struggle, see Zulalian 1970: 11-13).

Then, some Armenian historians began to advocate ideas similar to those of Aivazian. One of them was V. N. Khachatryan. He represented Hayasa as a mighty state on the Armenian plateau, a “huge independent state” comprising the Ararat Valley in the east, i.e. the territory of the contemporary Republic of Armenia, and involved in permanent wars against the Hittites (Khachatryan 1973: 40-45). Khachatryan identified ethnicity with language and imposed on the Hittites the

notion of ethnic identity that was common in the USSR. He did his best to identify the Hayasa people with the Indo-Europeans. How did he manage to do that? He played down the personal names of the Hayasa kings and gods known from Hittite documents as non-representative since they might have been borrowed from outside. Instead, he was attracted by local place names, among which he found some analogies to contemporary Armenian language. This served as the basis for his far-reaching conclusion about the Hayasa people's ethnic affiliation (Khachatrian 1972: 36-37, 1976: 65-66). At the same time, neither Djahukian, nor Diakonov could find any old Indo-European, let alone Armenian, place names on the Armenian plateau (Djahukian 1980: 115; Diakonov 1983: 164). Perhaps because of that, while discussing this issue in one of the latest articles dealing with the problem, Khachatrian rejected the theory of borrowing and maintained that the names of the Hayasa kings and gods were Armenian as well (Khachatrian 1980: 109-112).

Having resolved this problem, Khachatrian identified Hayasa with the later "alliance of Nairi countries" known through Assyrian sources¹²). In his view, in the mid-9th century B.C. this alliance united with two others – the Urartian and Shubarian – under a king named Arme. It was in this way that the kingdom of Urartu emerged. Thus, Khachatrian argued, the bulk of its population was made up of "Nairi", or "Hayasa" people. The survival of their language was not threatened by the fact that all official documentation in Urartu was kept in the language of the Urartian elite. The author narrated the permanent struggle of the "Hayasa" people against the hateful Urartian rule. In time, the "Hayasa" people assimilated the Urartians and Shubarrians, and that resulted in the emergence of the Armenian people (Khachatrian 1972, 1976: 64, 1980: 102, 109). To put this another way, there was no room for the newcomers from the Balkans, the Mushki were mentioned only in passing as a subsidiary element, and the main role in the formation of the Armenian people was played by indigenous Hayasa people, who, instructively, had no reason to drop their native language. Moreover, the emergence of the Armenian people was accompanied by the successful heroic national-liberation struggle against Urartu for the re-establishment of statehood that had once been lost. In Khachatrian's view, a special role in this struggle was played by one of the Nairi countries, named Arme (Shupria). While referring to Moses of Khoren's narratives and interpreting them in his own way, Khachatrian argued that Armenia already existed in 681 B.C. (Khachatrian 1976: 66-68, 1980: 106).

Having described the valorous participation of this "Armenia" together with Media (under Hayasa's hegemony though!) in the destruction of Urartu, Khachatrian, following Yeremian, called Paroyr the first Armenian king, although he failed to mention his Saka (i.e. Iranian!) relations at all. He argued that this new Armenian state was formed under the hegemony of the Arme tribe and from the very beginning enjoyed the self-designation "Hayq". Khachatrian did his best to prove that it occupied the same territory as Hayasa first did, and Nairi did later on, and maintained that all the old place names in this territory were the same as the

contemporary Armenian ones. Even more, he claimed that the Hayasa people lived there from at least the mid-3rd Millennium B.C. (Khachatrian 1976: 68-71). As a result, it turned out first that the Hayasa people and their descendants were Armenians, second, they occupied the same territory on the Armenian plateau for thousands of years, third, their language was unbelievably persistent – it did not change for millennia, and finally, the continuous development of the Armenian state was depicted from as long ago as the mid-2nd Millennium B.C.

Khachatrian's view was met with sharp criticism from Diakonov, who found it unsubstantiated and distorting of historical evidence. He believed that there was no reason at all to identify Hayasa with Nairi, that Nairi was an obscure geographical notion rather than any tribal alliance, that many place names on the Armenian plateau could be explained only with the help of local pre-Armenian languages, and that the scarce evidence at hand was really not enough to resolve the problem of the Hayasa language. Finally, Diakonov pointed out the biblical sources of Moses of Khoren's knowledge and said that a contemporary scholar could not base his conclusions on such unreliable evidence. He called Khachatrian's concept an "apocrypha of the 20th century" and considered it too emotional (Diakonov 1983: 155-164).

At the same time, Khachatrian's views met the demands for Armenian identity much better than the purely scholarly and emotionless approach of Diakonov. Moreover, the events of 1978 demonstrated perfectly well the crucial role of the state in managing linguistic processes. From that time, it became especially important for Armenian authors to emphasize the role of the state in the formation and consolidation of an ethnic group.

In 1980, M. A. Katvalian defended his doctoral thesis at Yerevan. His project dealt with the formation of the most ancient Armenian state on the Armenian plateau. From the very beginning, Katvalian emphasized the crucial role of the state in the formation of an ethnic group, and viewed the loss of the state tradition as a factor that causes its disintegration (Katvalian 1980: 3).

An attempt to prove that the Urartian state played an outstanding role in the formation of the Armenian people made up the core of his thesis. In order to confirm this, he first moved the center of this state north of Lake Van as close to Soviet Armenia as possible (no specialist would dare to do this trick). Thus, Urartu turned out to be an old "country of Ararat", and now the name Urartu originated from Ararat rather than vice-versa. Second, there was no question of any "national-liberation struggle" of the natives against the Urartian kings. Instead, the consolidation of the Ararat people was considered a response to an external threat from the Assyrian side. Third, the Urartian written language was treated as an artificial bureaucratic one that had never been used in ordinary life. At the same time, a uniform language was formed within Urartu/Ararat, and the author stressed that this occurred under the "conscious intervention of state authorities". This very view of how a nation was formed, and the term "merger" used by the author were clear evidence of the extent to which he was impressed by the processes which he

could observe in the USSR at that time. All this reasoning led him to believe that the Armenian people had emerged before the beginning of the 6th century B.C., after which the country lost its political independence and was subjugated initially by Media and then by Persia (Katvalian 1980).

In Diakonov's view, Katvalian followed Khachatrian's line. Notwithstanding, Katvalian went much further, to the extent that he identified the Urartian state with the Armenian people unreservedly. Perhaps he was inspired by the ideas of the amateur, Suren Aivazian. Indeed, it was in the latter's works that the Armenian ethno-cultural world was pressing the role of the Urartians harder and harder. It is worth noting that the reviewers of Katvalian's thesis were the Academician Yeremian and the aforementioned historian, Khachatrian, who supported the author's main conclusions with their heavy weight.

A. Mnatsakanian continued the Armenization of Urartu. While sharing many of Khachatrian's ideas, he tried to improve his concept in respect to the nature of Urartian administration. Whereas Khachatrian maintained that "alien kings" who had nothing to do with the Armenian people ruled in Urartu (Khachatrian 1980: 104), Mnatsakanian did his best to Armenize the local elite, not just the commoners, in Urartu. He claimed that the Hurrian-Urartian kings and their relatives accounted for only a small stratum and in their real policy had to rely on the governors, who had local roots. In this way the Armenians dominated in Urartu politically rather than by numbers alone. That is why, the author pointed out, even Assyria sometimes failed to subjugate them (Mnatsakanian 1981). While discussing Mnatsakanian's article, Diakonov called it non-scholarship, for the author based all his conclusions on the narratives of Moses of Khoren, who knew nothing about Urartu (Diakonov 1983: 163).

From the beginning of the 1970s, the Armenians felt that they had to be a truly indigenous people, and Diakonov's view failed to meet this need. When in 1980 the major journal of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR arranged a discussion of the origins of the Armenian people, only those leading Russian scholars were invited who shared an autochthonist concept of the Armenians' origins on the Armenian plateau (Shirokov 1980; Klychkov 1980). There was no room for Diakonov at this meeting.

The philologist, R. A. Ishkhanian, developed the most radical version of the revisionist concept¹³). He was very active in the Armenian national movement and especially in the struggle for Nagorny Karabagh, demonstrating that his enthusiasm about the issue of the Armenians' origins was by no means inspired by curiosity alone. In contrast to Aivazian, he was a professional philologist, however in a different field. He was an expert in the history of printing in Armenia. In 1969, for the first time, he tested himself in Urartuan studies when he took part in a discussion arranged by "Garun" journal. He became especially active in the very late 1970s, when he argued that Asia Minor was a genuine Indo-European homeland and, thus, the Armenians were its true indigenous people. His enthusiasm was based on the then fashionable ideas of V. Ivanov and T. Gamkrelidze (for

example, see Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984). He failed to inform the reader though that by that time there were other hypotheses of a different location of the Indo-European homeland, and that the issue was still unresolved. He went even further and argued that the Armenians were living on the Armenian plateau already by the 4th Millennium B.C. and that they had formed an original ethnic community there immediately after the proto-Indo-European entity disintegrated. He disseminated all of these ideas among the Yerevan students (Ishkhanian 1979a), Comsomol members (Ishkhanian 1979b), Communists (Ishkhanian 1980) and writers (Ishkhanian 1981). Then, in 1984 he published a book in Beirut of which versions in the Armenian language were issued in Yerevan at the end of the 1980s. One of these editions was particularly aimed at secondary school pupils (Ishkhanian 1988, 1989. For that see Astourian 1994: 45, 76, note 14.) (At that time Beirut was the center for the most radical Armenian nationalists, who organized secret terrorist groups waging a struggle for the independence of Armenia. See Goldenberg 1994: 139).

Ishkhanian based his reasoning on the Soviet approach, which treated language as one of the crucial factors of ethnic identity. He highly simplified this approach to the extent that he identified the problem of the people's origins with the origin of the language. In particular, he claimed that "language was the main, or to put it correctly, the only criterion distinguishing between ethnic groups in the West Asian region" (Ishkhanian 1981: 67, 1982: 33). As an example, he referred to the Greeks, whose identity in his view was closely connected to their language. However, that was not true, as is well known to experts in the field (Just 1989: 81-82). Moreover identity was defined mainly through religious affiliation, both in Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, regardless of language. All the same, Ishkhanian maintained: "One should begin the history of Armenians, or Armenian people, since the time when the Armenian language appeared at the scene, because the Armenians (or Armenian people) both in the early days, in the medieval past and at present are the bearers of the Armenian language" (Ishkhanian 1981: 67, 1982: 33). While saying this, he ignored the Armenian Diaspora, people who are by no means always competent in the Armenian language (for example, see Mirak 1997: 398-399, 406-407)¹⁴.

However, in Ishkhanian's view, politics and culture were indissoluble, and he claimed that one could not struggle for an independent Armenia without mastering the Armenian language (Ishkhanian 1991: 35). In his early ethnogenetic works, Ishkhanian neglected the role of the Armeno-Gregorian Church, which served as the core of Armenian identity for centuries. He might have done that to avoid dealing with censorship or perhaps also because the prestige of the catholicosate had fallen in the eyes of Armenian nationalists during the last Soviet decade (Goldenberg 1994: 137). At the same time, in the very late 1980s, Ishkhanian began to appreciate the importance of role of the Armeno-Gregorian Church to Armenians (Ishkhanian 1991: 36).

Ishkhanian's simplified approach made it possible to argue that the Armenian

people emerged just after the uniform Indo-European language disintegrated. Ishkhanian located the Indo-European homeland in Asia Minor and dated its dissolution to the 4th Millennium B.C. All these arguments made the Armenians one of the oldest peoples in the world. It goes without saying that this referred to “Hayasa – the state of the early Armenians”. Among other arguments, Ishkhanian referred to evidence of would-be direct contacts between the Armenians, on the one hand, and the Sumerians and Semites, on the other hand (as already mentioned, all this evidence is highly questionable), and maintained that the Akkadian rulers of Mesopotamia in the late 3rd Millennium B.C. were aware of the Armenians and made every effort to subjugate them. Ishkhanian saw a contradiction in that Armenian scholars, on the one hand, recognized the large number of Armenians in Urartu, but on the other hand, kept isolating this stage of Armenian history. He suggested an easy solution to this controversy – one had to reject the “Urtian mirage” and recognize that in the 9th – 7th centuries B.C. the Armenian people developed within, he emphasized, “the Armenian Kingdom of Van”. He claimed that the Urtian language was the language of state bureaucracy, which had nothing in common with the vernacular of the bulk of the population (Ishkhanian 1981, 1988).

The only obstacle for this concept was the great weight of Diakonov, who kept defending the orthodox view. Ishkhanian mobilized all his energy to disprove Diakonov’s arguments. He maintained that the Armenian language had nothing to do with those of Thracian-Phrygians, that the Phrygian homeland was situated in Asia Minor rather than in the Balkans, and that, if the “Mushki” had merged with the Hurrians, the latter had to be included in a list of Armenian ancestors. Finally, his main argument was based on the identification of Armenian ethnogenesis with the history of the Armenian language (Ishkhanian 1988: 9-23). At the same time, Diakonov was right on point when he warned against this sort of identification and taught that one had to distinguish among three different issues – biological origins, the roots of a cultural tradition, and the formation of language. He demonstrated that with the reference to the Armenian language, one was able to conclude that the Armenians were descendants of the Urartians, who shifted to an Indo-European language after a long period of bilingualism. In order to explain language replacement, he assumed that it was the nomadic way of life of the Mushki pastoralists and traders that made for the extensive spread of the Armenian language, first as a lingua franca and then as the language of commoners. It is in this way, rather than through a purposeful state policy, that various languages used to spread across the early Near East (Diakonov 1981a, 1983: 149, 153, 168-170, 175).

In the meantime, the political environment was changing rapidly in the 1980s: the nationalist movement was growing in Armenia (Suny 1983: 78-81), and the issue of Armenian ethnogenesis proved to be politically important. An autochthonist theory not only made the Armenians an indigenous population on the Armenian plateau par excellence, but also served as an important argument in the struggle for Nagorny Karabagh, and made dreams of an Armenian independent state by no

means hopeless. Armenian authors became aware of the political implications of historical concepts and got interested in this aspect of the productions of their medieval predecessors (for example, see Babaian 1980). They were also alarmed by the threat of Russification, and the fact that their people's future was facing admittedly ill-born tendencies (for example, see Ishkhanian 1991: 26). All of this encouraged an interest in the past, in a search for ethno-protective ammunition. Some Armenian scholars identified the latter with the Armeno-Gregorian Church (Melkonian 1980). Others considered the autochthonous theory of Armenian ethnogenesis of no less importance.

That is why even advocates of the orthodox view tried to change its meaning by shifting the emphasis; now the aboriginals who merged with the Mushki newcomers – rather than the latter themselves – began to be treated as the “proto-Armenians”. For example, O. O. Karagezian, who recognized the eastward movement of the Thracians (that is obviously what he called the Thracian-Phrygians. V. Sh.) all across Asia Minor and the Mushki's clear role in the formation of the Armenian people, placed his main emphasis on the local inhabitants, who made up the core of the future Armenians (Karagezian 1981). To put it differently, blood and soil began to win the victory over language. Yet that was not the end of the story.

By the end of the 1980s, Karagezian went so far as to argue that the “ancient Armenian tribal unions both genetically and linguistically were not only Indo-Europeans but indigenous inhabitants of the Armenian plateau; and nowadays the myth of the Armenian newcomers as if they conquered and assimilated any indigenous non-Indo-European population, proved to be refuted” (Karagezian 1988: 75). After that, he needed neither the Urartian state, nor Hayasa; instead, he constructed the state of Etiuna, as if it encompassed all the northern part of Armenian plateau from the Kura River to the Çoroh River in the 9th to 7th centuries B.C. He derived the Armenian self-designation from the name of this country and found many genuine Armenian place names there that, in his view, proved the autochthonist theory. He went so far as to revise the origin of the name Yerevan that, he said, derived from the Indo-European rather than from the Urartian lexicon. In this way Yerevan turned out to be an original Armenian city rather than simply one of the most ancient cities in the world (Karagezian 1988).

Some other Armenian authors continued to develop the Hayasa argument. Having carried out no special detailed studies, first they enormously extended the territory of historical Hayasa, making a hybrid of the opposite approaches of Kapantsian and Manandian, and second, argued without hesitation that both Hayasa and Azzi inhabitants were not only Indo-European in general, as Djahukian believed, but that they spoke a proto-Armenian language (S. Petrosian 1987).

These sorts of ideas rapidly won the attention of Armenian scholars. Now, an Armenian archaeologist, V. E. Oganessian, with all confidence identified the Trialeti archaeological culture of the early 2nd Millennium B.C. with the Indo-Europeans and assumed that they had arrived in the region between the Kura and Arax Rivers

from the Western Armenian plateau (Oganesian 1988). Another archaeologist, G. Areshian, went even further and argued that the “Armeno-Aryans” had lived between the Kura and Arax Rivers since the very late 3rd Millennium B.C. (Areshian 1992b: 27. Instructively, he demonstrated a more cautious approach in the version of this article published in a Moscow scholarly journal. There he discussed the Indo-Europeans in general and traced their folklore through the Trialeti archaeological culture. See Areshian 1988: 102). Referring to these constructions and also to some linguistic and folklore data, one other Armenian scholar not only argued that Indo-Europeans lived in the vicinity of Lake Sevan but pushed this Indo-European period to the beginning of the 2nd Millennium B.C. (A. Petrosian 1987). For some Armenian specialists, the term “Indo-Europeans” sounded like “proto-Armenians”, and it is by no accident that very soon V. E. Oganesian found himself among the leaders of the “Dashnaksutium” party (Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 158, 173). Thus, gradually the Armenians became a unique people, who lived eternally and in the same territory until 1915. Significantly, no later than 1988 Karagezian was quite aware that the “problem of the ethnogenesis of the Armenian people was not only of scholarly interest but of a political nature” (Karagezian 1988: 57).

In 1988, major Armenian researchers, the Academicians B. Arakelian, G. Djahukian and G. Sarkisian, published a seminal volume in Yerevan, whose main idea was clear from its very title: “Urartu-Armenia”. A year before they came out against Ishkhanian’s and other revisionist concepts – they accused the latter of an amateurish and simplified approach to history, based on extreme patriotism. In particular, they said that the location of the Indo-European homeland had not been finally established and there was no reason to ascribe to early Akkadians any awareness of the Armenians, who did not exist at that time (Arakelian, Djahukian, Sarkisian 1987). Without giving up these arguments, in their volume they legitimized with all their weight Hayasa participation in Armenian ethnogenesis. While recognizing Urartu as the first historically known state on the Armenian plateau and discussing the heterogeneity of its population, they emphasized the effective assimilative role of the Armenians, who had managed to Armenize all the inhabitants of Urartu by its final days. One of their main conclusions was as follows: “the first and only people, who formed the territory of Armenia, were and are the Armenian people” (Arakelian, Djahukian, Sarkisian 1988).

Since that time, Hayasa-Azzi was unreservedly declared an Armenian-speaking country, and the Thracian-Phrygians, including the Mushki, were treated as an indigenous population of Asia Minor who lived in close proximity to it (Kosian 1991). Without any hesitation, the Urartians began to be identified with the “Armens”, and the “Urartu-Armenian” population, together with their rulers, became ethnically homogeneous in Armenian publications (Sarkisian 1991). All of this spread far beyond the narrow framework of scholarly discourse.

In late 1988, the “Grakan ter” weekly of the Armenian Union of Writers published a generous review of Ishkhanian’s book, which was followed by an

article by Ishkhanian himself, aimed at Diakonov's views. Not only Diakonov's articles, which advocated the orthodox theory, were the reason for this attack. More important was the fact that the Moscow journal, "Ogoniok", had published a rapturous review of Diakonov's works, written by the director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, the Academician Z. M. Buniatov. In 1988-1989, the latter was one of the most active and influential Azeri scholars to protest against the Armenian claims for Nagorny Karabagh. He was one of the chief builders of a theory of Caucasian Albanian roots for the Azeri people. This theory treated the Armenians as later newcomers to the land between the Kura and Arax Rivers. That is why, in Ishkhanian's view, Diakonov's concept provided the Azeris with arguments which they used to their benefit against the Armenians. Indeed, Diakonov's concept undermined the image of the Armenians as an entirely indigenous population, which was of crucial importance to Armenian nationalists in the existing ethnopolitical environment (Astourian 1994: 48-49).

At the same time, the revisionist view was also aimed at the leading Armenian historians, who had discredited themselves by their former compromises with Soviet ideology. Revisionists thought that time was ripe in the end of the 1980s, for them to upgrade their position within the Armenian historical profession. In order to achieve this goal they used to their advantage the emerging critical political changes and participated actively in the Armenian national movement and in the struggle for Nagorny Karabagh. They published articles in popular magazines oriented towards the new anti-Communist government of Armenia (for that, see Astourian 1994: 51-52). At the same time, in 1989-1990 an academic "Historical-philological journal" regularly published articles by major Armenian scholars, aimed against the revisionists (Arakalian 1989; Sarkisian 1990). In particular, Armenian archaeologists criticized Ishkhanian for his simplified approach to the ethnogenesis of the Armenian people that completely neglected archaeological data. They referred to such prominent specialists as Piotrovsky and Diakonov, who emphasized the intensive contacts and merger of the Armenian ancestors with the Urartians (Tiratsian, Areshian 1990; Areshian 1992a: 26-27).

Nonetheless, in the early 1990s, the revisionist views became very popular with the Armenians (Abrahamian 1998: 7). The term "Urartu" disappeared from mass publications and from TV screens, where it was replaced by the "Armenian Kingdom". It was no accident that all of these changes coincided with the adoption of a declaration by the Parliament of Armenia in the beginning of 1991, which spoke of the refusal to recognize the Turkish-Soviet border established by the Kars treaty of 1921 (Goldenberg 1994: 53). As paradoxical as it may seem, the popular "Urartu" newspaper began to be issued in Yerevan at that time, in which pseudo-scientific materials were generously published. An article by Aivazian was one of the most impressive among them, in which the author bent his efforts to proving the same ancestry for both the Armenians and the Russians. Thus he developed some ideas picked up from radical Russian nationalists.

The name Suren Aivazian became popular on the crest of the wave of the

nationalism in Armenia in the late 1980s. At that time first of all Aivazian managed to publish in Yerevan his patriotic concept of the history of the Armenian people, which identified the Urartians with the Armenians (Aivazian 1986), and secondly, he was active in sending letters to Mikhail Gorbachev in defense of Armenian interests, in particular, those that concerned Nagorny Karabagh (Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutaflan 1994: 147). In 1993, he founded the newspaper "Dashnaktsutiun" in Yerevan. In it he continued to popularize his extreme revisionist ideas of the origins and early history of the Armenians. Finally, in 1997 he managed to publish a whole volume in Moscow in which he developed his concept of the history of the Armenians and Armenia from their very beginnings up to the present day (Aivazian 1997). In this book he attacked professional historians, accusing them of conservatism and the distortion of history for ideological reasons. Having cleaned the historical field for himself, he set forth the most fantastic ideas that were developed over 10-20 years by both Armenian and Russian nationalists.

Whereas Kapantsian declared Hayasa the cradle of the Armenians, Aivazian called Ararat the "cradle of the Russians"¹⁵). He assumed that it was there that the homeland of the legendary Vedaic Aryans was situated; and he did not fail to identify those Aryans with the "proto-Russians". He treated human skeletons from the Lchashen graveyard of the 2nd Millennium B.C. as evidence of the cohabitation of proto-Russian with the Armenians of the Lake Sevan region. He went even further and declared the Russians the earliest to populate Georgia, whereas the Iberians (the Georgian ancestors) had arrived from Spain only in the 6th century B.C. While depriving the Georgians of an early history in Transcaucasia, Aivazian instead generously shared it with the Russians, and at this time identified the Aryans (together with the Hyksos) both with the proto-Armenians and proto-Russians. He also argued that the earliest state in Armenia was established in 2107 B.C. (this legendary date was borrowed from Moses of Khoren). As decisive evidence, Aivazian once again referred to the Medzamor materials, and, muddling up archaeological chronology and layers, identified them with Hayasa. In his view, Zoroaster lived there, and it is there that the "Vedaic" literature and "Avesta" were finally completed. He represented the proto-Russians and proto-Armenians as the great civiliziers, who provided all other people with their main cultural achievements, including a writing system and a calendar. He ascribed to them not only the semi-legendary Hayasa but also the historical state of Mittani, established by the Hurrians. "Armenia" was described as having been founded by someone called Aram the Unifier, encompassing a huge territory by the early 2nd Millennium B.C. (Aivazian 1997: 352) as if it had maintained that territory until the end of the 18th century A.D. In order to prove that, Aivazian published a map of Armenian settlements between the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas in the 18th century (Aivazian 1997: 184, fig. 208).

He called the Urartian state "nonsense" and ascribed to himself the merit of the disproof of this "delusion". At the same time, he used all his incredible imagination to draw a continuous line for the Armenian dynasty, beginning in 2107 B.C. It goes

without saying that he ignored not only Urartu but also Persia. He turned Atropat into an Armenian king, and thus, Atropatene turned into an Armenian province. Moreover, he maintained that Christianity was introduced to Armenia by Jesus Christ's disciples in A.D. 33 and that the earliest Christian churches were built in Nakhjivan and Ejmiatsin. The more he wrote the more his fantasy ran high, and he narrated the story of an Empire from Spain to India that was built by the "Armenian King Tigran" in the 6th century B.C. He went so far as to claim that another Armenian king defeated the troops of Alexander the Great (Aivazian 1997: 352). Instructively, he did not mention the sources of all this amazing information.

Aivazian is not satisfied by his sensational "discoveries" in early Armenian history, and he finds many Armenians among Byzantine emperors, sees an Armenian prince founding the city of Kiev, declares the medieval intellectual, Ioann Petritsi, to be an Armenian scholar (Aivazian 1997: 244-245). We shall see further on, how the latter is contested by the Georgians and Abkhazians. But the core of Aivazian's book is his attempts to prove millennially friendly relation between the Armenians and the Russians. That is why he so badly needs the common "Russian-Armenian homeland", the representation of the Aryans as the "Russian-Armenian community", the foundation of Kiev by an Armenian prince, an Armenian dynastic rule there before the Varangians, and even the baptism of Rus' with the mediation of a Byzantine emperor, whom Aivazian turns into an Armenian. True, Aivazian extends the history of the Kievan Rus' as much as 300 years into the past, but this early period is characterized by Armenian rule there.

Yet, all of this does not seem to satisfy him, and he ascribes the medieval history of Georgia to the Armenians. In particular, all the medieval Georgian kings, including David the Builder and Queen Tamara, are called Armenians (Aivazian 1997: 266). Moreover, he puts early "Armenians" of the 2nd – 1st Millennium B.C. in the southeastern Black Sea region (Aivazian 1997: 267) where the Georgians were searching for their own ancestors.

While demonstrating a typical primordialist approach, Aivazian explained relationships between ethnic groups, not through their current vital interests but with quite irrational motives, i.e. "long historical experience" and "national character". That is why, in his view, it makes no sense to dream of any mutual tolerance between the Armenians and the Turks. Quite the opposite, the Russians and the Armenians are closely linked by the experience of the co-habitation of their proto-ethnoses on the Armenian plateau (Aivazian 1997: 352). The way Aivazian characterizes the Turks is close to racism (for example, see Aivazian 1997: 469-470, 474-477); and he scares the Russians with the would-be threat of the "Great Turan" (Aivazian 1997: 473, 477). The image of the Great Turan pursues the Armenians like a nightmare that has intensified during the last 10-15 years as a result of the Karabagh tragedy. This feeling infused even Russians, who lived in Armenia. For example, the Russian ambassador, who had spent a few years in Yerevan, could not avoid it (Stupishin 1998).

All of this is no accident. The Armenians always made great efforts to inform

the Russian authorities of their alarm about the pan-Turkic threat. This was the result of their special attitude toward Russia, which for the last two centuries was cultivated by Armenian nationalists, who treated her as their natural and only ally against pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism (for that, see Ishkhanian 1991). It is also no accident that Aivazian tends to make friends of those factions within contemporary Russian nationalism, who openly demonstrate their anti-Turkic attitudes (Aivazian 1997: 381-383). Moreover, in order to establish close relationships with Russian radicals, Aivazian is ready to share their fierce anti-Semitism and turns the Jews into, perhaps, the main organizers of the Armenian genocide of 1915 (Aivazian 1997: 357-358). He discovers the same evil agent even in Urartu. To accomplish that, he identifies the Hurrians with the Semites and turns the Urartians into a "Judaized nobility" (S. Arutiunov. pers. communication). This odd enrichment of the traditional anti-Turkic and anti-Muslim attitudes became a common characteristic of some Armenian radical political movements from the end of the 1980s (for that, see Ishkhanian 1991: 29-30).

At the same time, the myth of the Armenians as a "unique phenomenon in the civilized world" is building up in the Armenian Diaspora. The myth follows Aivazian's line and claims that all the main achievements of the culture are rooted in Armenia; in particular, it is emphasized that the most ancient alphabet, which gave birth to all the writing systems in the world, was invented in Armenia. According to the myth, Armenia was the cradle of humankind. An enthusiastic adherent of this myth is the musician and sexologist, S. S. Mamulov, who lives in Moscow (Mamulov 1993-1997). True, he complains that the Armenian community in Moscow is less enthusiastic about his constructions.

Thus, the development of the Armenian historical myth went through three different periods. Initially, after the dissolution of the Russian Empire and an establishment of the Armenian Democratic Republic the Armenians did their best to oppose themselves to the Caucasian world. This they did against high political activity of Turkey then promoting the Caucasian project, which was to unite all the Caucasian peoples under the banner of Islam and Turkish protection. This was of course unacceptable for the Armenians, and they appreciated an identification with the Indo-Europeans who arrived in Asia Minor and the Caucasus from elsewhere.

The situation changed drastically in the 1940s when the idea of the primordial Indo-European (Indo-Germanic, Aryan) community was abused by the Nazi Germany. Besides, the Armenians were especially interested in those lands of the former Greater Armenia that were absorbed by the Turkish state. Just after the end of World War II, the Armenians expected the USSR to be able to take back those lands as had been done for Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia. Furthermore, repatriation was on the agenda, and one had to convince the Armenians of the Diaspora that their true homeland was situated within Soviet Armenia. That is why

proof that the Armenians were the indigenous population of Eastern Asia Minor was the primary task at that time. And one of the key areas in this vast region was shifting closer and closer to Soviet Armenia. Since at that time the common opinion was that the Indo-Europeans were newcomers in Asia Minor, Armenian scholars did their best to isolate the Armenian ancestors of the Indo-European community and to identify them with the bearers of some unknown non-Indo-European languages. However, since this language issue was quite obscure, Armenian scholars argued that the Armenians made up the core of the Hayasa population. And the similarity of that name with the Armenian self-designation was used to prove that.

The Soviet plan for the annexation of the Turkish lands has failed, and Soviet Armenia was officially declared the true Armenian homeland. At the same time, arguments were put forward in favor of the location of the Indo-European homeland in Asia Minor. Simultaneously, the situation in Karabagh began to deteriorate. Also, in 1965 the Armenians got official permission to express their grief in memory of the genocide of the Armenian people, and the Armenian Martyrs' Day was established. All of this made the problem of the first settlers an especially hot issue. Now, the question was not only about the genuine Armenian lands in Eastern Turkey. It was necessary to prove that the Armenians arrived in Southern Transcaucasia at an earlier date; and the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers, where the early Armenian provinces of Artsakh and Utik were situated, became of major importance. That is why those ethnogenetic schemas developed by the Armenian scholars over the last few decades are focused on the arguments that these two regions constituted Armenian lands from very early on, that the development there of the early Armenian states was unbroken, and that ethnic Armenian continuity was observed there. All of this was in order to support the Armenian claims for Artsakh.

The Armenian ethnogenetic schemas place major emphasis on the linguistic factor that shapes the Armenian identity. The Armenians were less satisfied with remote ancestors, who had lost their mother tongue and shifted to another language, brought by some newcomers. That is why, regardless of whether they shared the migrationist or autochthonist approach, Armenian authors focused on ancestors, who were the bearers of Armenian speech. Paradoxically, this coincided with Armenian pride in the assimilative abilities of their remote ancestors. Apparently, the latter led to the conclusion that in biological terms the Armenian people formed of the local population of Asia Minor, quite heterogeneous in language and culture, that shifted to the Armenian language. In fact, many Armenian authors acknowledged that, but they did their best to push the threshold of language assimilation as far back into the past as possible. As a result, this strategy caused the total combination of both linguistic and biological factors, because those early periods were in question when one was unable to make any distinction between them for lack of evidence. The hypothesis of an Indo-European homeland on the Armenian plateau added to the popularity of this approach. Its exaggeration resulted in there being no room left in the northern part of the Near East for other, non-Indo-

European, languages. Thus, a heavy blow was dealt not only to the state of Urartu, with its language of the North-Caucasian stock, but also to the Georgian view of Georgian ethnogenesis which, as we shall see further on, used to include Asia Minor in the earliest area covered by the Kartvelian languages.

Besides language, another important element of Armenian identity is its close links with a state organization. A painful point of Armenian history is that the Armenians lacked their own sovereign state for most of the medieval period, and later on, actually until very recently. That is why they especially appreciated the theory of an early statehood that, first, served as a crucial symbol of the unity of the Armenian people, and second, let Armenians consider themselves a state people and hope that their state would be restored at some future time. An early state, if it was famous with glorious deeds but lasted for a short time could not meet this demand. That is why the Armenian authors demonstrated an aspiration to reconstruct a long continuity for the early Armenian states that was unbroken for centuries. Indeed, only that could represent the Armenians as the bearers of a long statehood tradition. The Armenians were no less willing to extend their roots as far back into the past as possible by turning them to the people, who enjoyed the earliest state in the territory of both Anatolia and Transcaucasia, rather than being merely a state people. Bearing that in mind, one can imagine what a generous gift to the Armenians was the discovery of the Urartian cuneiform inscription in Yerevan. Hence, the great enthusiasm that was manifested by the Armenians in 1968 when they were celebrating the 2,750th anniversary of their capital. Yet, the celebration was darkened by one fact – the inscription was made in the wrong language. Indeed, the Armenian ethnogenetic schema required that the entire population of the earliest state, together with its rulers, spoke the Armenian language. This was how the language factor had to combine with the political one. This provided the Armenians with a very strong argument in order to make claims for the respective vast lands as an early ethnic area of the Armenian people.

The territorial issue was echoed in all versions of the Armenian ethnogenesis. This was a very painful issue because a substantial Armenian population in the region in question was for centuries subordinated to Turkic rulers and greatly affected by Turkic culture. Moreover, the major part of all these lands was lost by the Armenians, as a result of acts of ethnic cleansing arranged during the decline of the Ottoman Empire. That is why all versions of Armenian ethnogenesis had to demonstrate the persistent flourishing of Armenian culture in all these lands, long before the Turks arrived there. The confirmation of an Armenian presence there from the time immemorial was no less important, and Armenian authors could only make a choice in favor of the autochthonous approach. For all the reasons addressed above, the Armenian ethnogenetic schemas were based on the four elements that played an important role in the Armenian identity, namely, language, statehood, territory and biological continuity. It seems that today the fifth element, that of religious identity, is growing in importance. This is manifested by a celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the State Christianity in Armenia in 2001.

The Armenians cannot but emphasize that Armenia was the first Christian state on the Earth, which has to upgrade its prestige and help them to overcome contemporary hardship.

CHAPTER 7

THE BIRTH OF THE AZERI NATION

Original Azerbaijan, or more correctly, the state of Atropatene, was one of the Hellenistic states situated in northwestern Iran from the end of the 4th century B.C. until the mid-2nd century B.C. It was populated by Iranian-speaking people up to the arrival of the Seljuqs in the 11th century A.D., when intensive Turkification took place. Until then, the local inhabitants spoke “Azeri”, an Iranian language. Even earlier, i.e. before an arrival of the Iranian-speaking tribes, northern Iran was populated by the Hurrians, whose language belonged to the North-Caucasian family of languages.

In the 1st Millennium A.D., Caucasian Albania was situated where the Republic of Azerbaijan is nowadays. The population of this state initially spoke various languages that were related to those of the contemporary North Caucasians. The Udins, occupying the Kutkashen area of Azerbaijan, remind us of that early language sub-stratum. Yet, even at the time of Caucasian Albania and later on, as well, the region was greatly affected by Iran, and Persian enjoyed even more success than the Albanian language. The Persians did their best to impose Zoroastrianism on the local inhabitants, and the Armenians imposed the Armenian-Gregorian Church (monophysiticism). In the 7th century, Caucasian Albania was conquered by the Arabs, and in the 7th – 8th centuries, Islam began to spread there. In the 6th century, the Persian Sussanians established the small frontier state of Shirvan on the left of the Kura River as an outpost against the Khazars. Gradually, it grew in power, and by the 10th century, after it had incorporated the former Albanian lands on the right of the Kura River with the cities of Barda and Ganja, it came to be a large state.

The Turkic-speaking groups began to infiltrate eastern Transcaucasia after the Hunn invasion of the 4th century A.D. However, the main threshold of intensive Turkification was the beginning of the 11th century, when a big new wave of conquerors flooded Azerbaijan. At that time, the Seljuqs came, a branch of the Oghuz Turks, who arrived from Central Asia. They waged successful wars against Byzantium, and after victory, at the battle of Mantzikirt in 1071, they subjugated the lion's share of Transcaucasia. Since that time, the population of northern Azerbaijan was intensively Turkified. The same occurred in southern Azerbaijan later by more than a century, i.e. from the 13th century on, when the region was incorporated by the Mongol state of Il-Khans whose capital was established in

Tabriz. Since the beginning of the 16th century, Azerbaijan was the center of the Safavi Persian Empire (1502-1722) which annexed Shirvan and introduced Shiism there. They used Shiism advantageously to oppose themselves to their enemies, the Ottoman Empire in the west and the state of Sheibanids in the east, which were run by Sunni Muslims. In this way, the Safavids, who used Turkic at court, opposed themselves to all the other Turks and emphasized their close relationships with Iran, who had a great cultural effect upon them (Novosel'tsev 1991: 190-196; Buniatov 1987a: 126-127).

In the meantime, those Albanians who continued practicing Christianity after the Arab conquest and Islamization and lived on the right bank of the Kura River were rapidly Armenized, and the Albanian Christian Church merged with the Armenian one. Under the Safavids, the Azerbaijan territory was divided into four provinces: Tabriz (with its center in Tabriz), Shukhur-Saada (with its center in Nakhjivan), Shirvan (with its center in Shirvan), and Karabagh (with its center in Ganja) (Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1984: 29-31; Altstadt 1992: 2-9). The lowlands and hilly flanks fell under administration of the Muslim dynasties of the Turkic khans, and some highland areas, including Karabagh, were still run by Armenian meliks, albeit under Persian protection.

Impetuous development in the beginning of the 18th century caused the decline of the Safavids, and after 1747, they broke up into several khanates, namely, the Karabagh, Nakhjivan, Shemakha, Yerevan and some others. Their rulers belonged to the Muslim Turkic dynasties, but the main body of population was heterogeneous in both language and religion. Besides the Turks, there were Armenians, Georgians, Lezghins, Avars and some other groups. Their communities enjoyed local autonomy, and in particular, the Christian communities successfully maintained their identity, church, language and literature (Altstadt 1992: 8). There were five Armenian polities in Karabagh, which were generously supported by Nadir Shah. True, after he was assassinated their position sharply deteriorated, and they fell into dependence upon the newly established Karabagh khanate (Ioannisian 1947: 15-17).

Until the 19th century, Persian held high status in Azerbaijan: it was the language of belles-lettres, and the most renowned local poets, like Nizami (1141-1209), wrote their poems in Persian. Even Abbas Kuli Bakikhanov, who is regarded as the first Azeri historian, composed his work in Persian. At the same time, under the Safavids poetry was cultivated in Turkic as well (Altstadt 1992: 12). In the beginning of the 19th century, the region became an apple of discord between Russia and Iran. As a result of military campaigns, it was annexed by Russia, and the Russian-Iranian border was established at the Arax River, by the Turkmanchai treaty of 1828. Over the course of the 19th century, the Russian authorities changed internal administrative borders in Transcaucasia several times. Initially, provinces coincided with the former khanates. Then, in 1841 all Transcaucasia was divided between the Georgian-Imeretian (with its center in Tbilisi) and the Caspian (with its center in Shemakha) provinces. Yelisavetpol' (the former Ganja) and Nakhjivan

were included in the former. In 1846, a new administrative division was introduced that was based on the four provinces – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Shemakha and Derbent – which were added with Yerevan in 1849 (at this time it included Nakhjivan). After Shemakha was destroyed by an earthquake in 1859, the center of Shemakha province was moved to Baku and its name was changed. While introducing all these administrative changes, the authorities respected neither ethnic composition nor historically established borders (Altstadt 1992: 18).

At the same time, impetuous processes during the 19th century caused tremendous ethno-demographic changes. Several regions of Azerbaijan (Karabagh, Yelisavetpol', Shemakha) witnessed a full flow of Armenian immigrants in the late 1820s. According to the national census of 1897, Turkic-speakers accounted for more than the half population of Baku (60 percent) and Yelisavetpol' (62 percent) provinces. However, in the former case, the second most numerous were Russians and the third were Armenians. The reverse situation was observed in the Yelisavetpol' province where the number of Armenians was only half that of the Turkic-speakers. Although the Turkic-speakers dominated in numbers in Baku, the number of Russians and Armenians taken together was higher there. In the Shusha and Zangezur areas, Armenians successfully competed with Turkic-speakers in numbers: their number was slightly higher in the Shusha, and slightly lower in Zangezur. At the same time, Turkic-speakers accounted for a substantial population segment in Yerevan province (37 percent against 53 percent Armenians) (Altstadt 1992: 28-30).

Various ethnic groups occupied different professional niches. Russians had decisive dominance in provincial and municipal administration and in the military; many of them were also employed by banks and legal offices. On their side, Armenians were prosperous merchants and oil industrialists. Landlords and businessmen made up the bulk of the rich Turkic-speakers. However, peasants made up the great majority of the Turkic-speaking population, and they were small tradesmen in urban areas. Local administration was also vested in the Turkic-speakers (Altstadt 1992: 31).

Political discrimination and economic competition were the basis for tense relationships between the Turkic-speakers and the Armenians. This resulted in bloody clashes that involved five administrative units of Yerevan and Yelisavetpol' provinces during 1905. At that time, 128 Armenian and 158 Turkic villages were completely destroyed. Instructively, at that time a debate had already broken out in the mass media that focused on who ran the local territories in the early days, Armenians or Turkic-speakers, and who had the right to establish their own state there (Altstadt 1992: 40-42). We shall see further on how this discourse affected the versions of ethnogenesis developed by both Armenian and Azeri scholars during the Soviet era.

The cultural renaissance observed in Azerbaijan in the late 19th – very early 20th centuries was a strong evidence of the emergence of the Azeri nation (Akhmedov 1983). By the mid-19th century, Mirza Kazimbek had invented a

literary Turkic language that was introduced as the language of instruction at school. The dramatist, Mirza Feth Ali Akhundov, began to compose plays in this language. In the very late 1870s, the first Turkic newspaper began to be published; it was the beginning of the Turkic mass media. The paper was run by the Sunni Muslims who, following the ideas of the Crimean Tatar intellectual, Ismail Gasparali, (Gasprinsky), oriented themselves toward the Ottoman Empire and advocated pan-Turkism. At the beginning of the 20th century, literate people began to call themselves Turks. They were still unsure whether they needed their own literary language and the development of their own nation, or if cultural-linguistic issues might be resolved at the basis of pan-Turkism. Many of them were adherents of the secularization and westernization that was the direct result of the rapid modernization of Azerbaijan (Swietochowski 1991: 57-61; Altstadt 1992: 51-54).

The introduction of a wide network of public schools was appreciated by the local elite, but it was dissatisfied with having Turkic used for instruction only in primary schools. Indeed, professional education at the higher levels was dominated by Russian. This resulted in shrinkage of mother tongue usage and threatened with Russification in the future. Even Azeri socialists shared this apprehension and suggested that two languages of instruction had to be used simultaneously at school (Altstadt 1992: 55-56).

The Russian authorities established strict control over the mullahs, in the hope that as a result they would strengthen their power over the Muslim population in general. By doing that, they overestimated Islam, which failed to provide mullahs with as much influence over the flock as was the case with Christianity (Altstadt 1992: 57-61). Moreover, the young Azeri nationalism, although it respected traditional faith, linked its own future with the resolution of mainly political and social problems rather than with Islam (Akhmedov 1983: 194 ff.; Altstadt 1992: 61, 64). In the view of A. Altstadt, there was no all-embracing fanatic pan-Turkism. True, some authors wrote of the unity of all Turks, but they bore in mind the unity of the Turks of northern and southern Azerbaijan most of all. Furthermore, they talked of intellectual and cultural rather than political unity. Many Azeris did not want to be incorporated into the uniform Turanian state that the Ottoman minister of war, Enver-pasha, was dreaming of (Altstadt 1992: 70, 76, 90. But see Swietochowski 1991: 59).

The formation of the Azeri nation followed two lines that were connected with external political orientations. The conservative branch that emphasized the religious life looked to Iran, and the liberals were more disposed to friendship with the Ottoman Empire. Yet, very soon it became clear that those were vain hopes, and the Azeri elite attempted to make an alliance with the Kazan' Tatar jadids. In general, the liberal Azeri elite cultivated anti-clerical attitudes (Akhmedov 1983: 194 ff.; Lemerrier-Quellejey 1984: 33). Azeri democrats believed that national self-awareness was based most of all on a common language and the idea of Motherland, and had nothing to do with Muslim consciousness (Akhmedov 1983: 198-200).

The center of the Azeri national movement was located in Yelisavetpol', whereas Baku was a cosmopolitan city. In 1917, this resulted in Russians and Armenians seizing power in Baku, having pushed aside the "Musavat" Azeri nationalist party; at the same time, a new local administration was made up of Azeri federalists and members of the "Tashnaktsutiun" Armenian nationalist party in Yelisavetpol' (Altstadt 1992: 79-80). At that time, the Azeri elite still supported the federalist project: at the first Congress of Caucasian Muslims held in Baku on April 15-20, 1917, representatives of various Azeri political parties voted for the organization of new Russia on "territorial-federal principles". This was also the Azeri position at the All-Russian Congress of Muslims in May 1917 (Altstadt 1992: 81).

In the meantime, the October revolution of 1917, the beginning of civil war in Russia and the demand for their own independent relationships with the Ottoman Empire in 1918 made the Azeris revise these plans. An independent Transcaucasian Federation emerged in April 1918, and by the end of May, it had already broken into three new independent states – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Altstadt 1992: 87). The establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan opened a new era for the Azeri people. The declaration of its sovereignty contained the term the "Azeri people", although this meant the entire population of Azerbaijan (Altstadt 1992: 89), whereas for the Turkic-speaking segment the term the "Azeri Turks" was used.

The contested territories made up one of the most serious problems for the new state. Azerbaijan claimed the lands of Nakhjivan, Zangezur (former Siunik) and Karabagh that were regarded by the Armenians as their own. Interestingly, a Russian-born official brought forward these claims on behalf of Azerbaijan (Shchepotiev 1990; Altstadt 1992: 92, 94). This was clear evidence of the lack of appropriate well-trained politicians among the Azeris themselves. The Azeris were aware of this problem, and Baku University was established in 1919 in order to train the local elite.

However, independence did not last very long. On April 27, 1920, Baku was occupied by Bolshevik troops, and the Soviet of the People's Commissars, with Nariman Narimanov as its head, was established there. True, the introduction of Soviet power was by no means an easy project. The Bolsheviks who sought support mainly among Russians and Armenians enjoyed great influence only in Baku, which was regarded by the Azeris as a pro-Russian city. They spent two months seizing Yelisavetpol', the stronghold of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, and putting down resistance in other areas. Only in mid-1920 was Soviet power finally established in Azerbaijan.

In 1922-1936, Azerbaijan was part of the Transcaucasian Federation, established in order to arrest the development of nationalism in separate republics. This was especially important for Azerbaijan where, as in the pre-revolutionary days, political power was still in the hands of Russians and Armenians, and the Azeris were unsatisfied with that (Altstadt 1992: 122-124).

In order to struggle against pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, the Bolsheviks reformed the alphabet: in 1924, the Arabic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet, and in 1937, it was changed to Cyrillic. On the one hand, this divorced the Azeris from their cultural heritage, which was being treated by the Soviet bureaucracy as a threatening source of religious, bourgeois and nationalist ideas; on the other hand, it made for the successful integration of the Azeris into the Russian culture and facilitated their Russification (Simon 1991: 45; Altstadt 1992: 124-125). This was much easier to accomplish since the Azeris were separated quite a bit from their compatriots, across national borders (Simon 1991: 154).

Simultaneously, ethnic minorities suffered persecutions in Azerbaijan. After Soviet power was established, the Iranian-speaking Talyshes, who lived in southeast Azerbaijan were dreaming of the restoration of the Talysh Mughan' Republic, declared in the summer of 1919 and brutally ruined by Ottoman troops. In 1936-1938, Talysh nationalists were exiled to Siberia, and Talysh schools were closed. Broadcasting in Talysh was abolished, and the Talyshes were deprived of their mass media in general. Since that time, the Talyshes have been pressed to identify themselves with the Azeris (Abduragimov 1995: 605).

Having seized Azerbaijan, the Bolsheviks inherited a territorial dispute that was rooted in what happened in the early 19th century. The Karabagh khanate was annexed by Russia after the first Russian-Iranian war of 1813 and was included into Yelisavetpol' province. The Yerevan and the Nakhjivan khanates were the reward for the second war of 1828. They were immediately transformed into an Armenian province, where Muslims accounted up to 80 percent of the population. In those days, Russia did its best to rouse the Armenian migrants of Iran and Ottoman Empire to resettle to southern Transcaucasia. As a result, the number of Armenians there was growing very fast and by 1850, Yerevan province was established, which included Nakhjivan (Altstadt 1992: 100).

After independent Armenia was established in 1918, it claimed the western half of the former Yelisavetpol' province (including Karabagh), the Kars region and part of Tiflis province. On its side, Azerbaijan considered Karabagh, Zangezur and Nakhjivan its own lands. Despite some attempts to resolve this issue through peaceful negotiations, in 1918-1920 all of these territories were involved in bloody clashes between the Armenian and Azeri troops (Altstadt 1992: 102-105). A development in Karabagh was especially complex. Initially, in September 1918 the All-Karabagh Conference accepted Azerbaijan rule. However, brutal actions of the newly appointed Governor-General, Kh. Beg Sultanov (van der Leeuw 2000: 152), forced local residents to revise their decision, and in February 1919 a new All-Karabagh Conference proclaimed unification with Armenia. Yet, in August 1919 Karabagh accepted a status of semi-autonomy within Azerbaijan (Sarkisyanz 1975: 224).

The new independent states failed to resolve the matter in general, and the Bolsheviks had to get into the dispute. Initially, Nakhjivan was declared a Soviet Socialist Republic, since it had a special relationship with Azerbaijan. Then, in

order to express sympathy with Soviet Armenia, the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee (Revkom) wanted to recognize its sovereignty over Zangezur and Nakhjivan. However, a referendum held in Nakhjivan in 1921 demonstrated that 90 percent of the local population were willing to join Azerbaijan. This was supported by the Turkish nationalists, led by Mustafa Kemal. As a result, a special paragraph in the Soviet-Turkish treaty of 1921 spoke of Azerbaijan sovereignty over Nakhjivan. The leaders of the then Caucasian government (Kavbureau) agreed with that. The issue of Karabagh was much more difficult. It was discussed by Kavbureau on July 4, 1921, with the participation of representatives from all the Transcaucasian republics. The majority voted for the transmission of Karabagh to Armenia, despite all the protests of Narimanov. Yet, the next day the decision was revised in favor of Azerbaijan (Altstadt 1992: 116-118).

In the end of 1922, in order to make a final decision on the Karabagh issue, which kept provoking bloody clashes, a special Commission was established in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CC CPA). The result of its activity was the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region (NKAR) in November 1924. Armenian was granted special status there, and measures were taken to provide local Armenians with everything they needed to develop their school system and promote their cultural development. Initially, the NKAR had a joint border with Armenia, but that connection was lost by the 1930s, after new administrative reforms (Altstadt 1992: 126-127).

The new Soviet Constitution of 1936 put an end to the Transcaucasian Federation. Now, all three Transcaucasian republics were admitted to the USSR quite independently and each could deal with the center without any mediator. At the same time, whatever was read in official documents, real politics were developing along a different line, colored by purges and persecutions. They commenced in Azerbaijan under S. Kirov in the early 1920s (Ashnin, Alpatov 2000) and were continued by Mir Djafar Baghirov (1896-1956) in the late 1930s through very early 1950s (van der Leeuw 2000: 125-128). His career began in the secret police, after which he was appointed the leader of the Azerbaijan Communist Party and the Chairman of the Soviet People's Commissariat (Sovnarkom) (in 1933-1953). The era of great terror began in Azerbaijan in 1933 and lasted until the war. All the former Communist and Soviet elite was charged with Trotskiism and bourgeois nationalism and was physically eliminated. Although Nariman Narimanov died in Moscow in 1925 and his remains were buried in the Kremlin wall, he also was denounced as a "bourgeois nationalist" in 1937-1938. A heavy blow was dealt to Azeri intellectuals as well (Ashnin, Alpatov 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2001; Altstadt 1992: 132-150; van der Leeuw 2000: 127-128).

Religious matters did not disappear. Muslim rituals and festivals began to be attacked in 1924. In the 1920s, these campaigns were restricted to anti-religious propaganda and criticism. In 1935-1938, the authorities closed many Sunni and Shia mosques (Lemercier-Quelquejey 1984: 38-39).

Yet, however strong was the blow dealt to Azeri political and cultural activists

in the 1930s, at that time the ruling elite was drastically changed in Azerbaijan: under Baghirov, Azeri officials replaced their Russian, Armenian and Jewish counterparts (Furman 1994: 152). During World War II, one could observe the revival of the national culture. Indeed, fiction and historical literature were mobilized to stir patriotic feelings, and the attitude towards Islam became less hostile. Some mosques were reopened, and Haji Mullah Aghalizade was appointed the head of the Shi'a Muslims. He was the leading sheikh at the time of independence (Altstadt 1992: 154-155). During the 1954-1964 decade, a new campaign took place, and all the mosques were closed once again (Lemercier-Quelquejey 1984: 39). In the view of some western scholars, this hardly affected religious orientations due to the Shi'a tradition of the *taqiya*: the legal right to apostasy in case of extreme need, which is balanced by an inner profession of faith (Lemercier-Quelquejey 1984: 48). However, divorce from canonical Islam for decades and the clear trend to secularization demonstrated by the Azeri intellectuals had their own cost. By the end of the 20th century, the Muslim tradition in Azerbaijan was highly weakened. Azeri culture and identity also suffered heavy losses due to pan-Turkic persecutions. In particular, in 1951 a campaign against the Azeri epic, *Dede Korkut*, was launched, attacking it for both "pan-Islamism" and "pan-Turkism" (Altstadt 1992: 171).

Many of these campaigns were closely connected with the name of Baghirov. That is why the Azeris felt relieved after he was dismissed from all his positions in July 1953, charged with having close connections with Beryia and with anti-Soviet activity, and executed by a firing squad in April 1956 (Altstadt 1992: 161-162).

In 1954-1959, the First secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, I. D. Mustafaev, promoted the development of Azeri culture and education. In 1958, education reform was proposed by Moscow, including the free choice of the language of instruction in schools. Despite their discontent, the local republican governments were pressed to include this point in their school reform programs. Azerbaijan was one of only a few republics that refused to obey (Simon 1991: 246-248). As a result, Mustafaev was accused of nationalism and removed from office (Altstadt 1992: 166). Yet, Azerbaijanization was growing in the republic. By the mid-1960s, the Azeris accounted for 61 percent of all Party members. Their share increased proportionally in the administration, albeit all the key positions were still occupied by Russians and Armenians (Altstadt 1992: 168).

In the 1950s, the Azeri population began growing very fast. By the end of the 1970s, the urban population (53 percent) overweighed the rural one for the first time in history. Baku, in particular, witnessed tremendous changes: more than 1.5 million people lived there, i.e. a quarter of the overall population of the republic. In the 1960s-1980s, the population of Azerbaijan in general increased in numbers from 3.7 million to 6.8 million persons. In contrast to Armenians, the great bulk of the Azeris tended to stay within the republic, and there was not any substantial Azeri Diaspora in the USSR. One of the reasons was probably that Shi'a Islam made the Azeris feel uncomfortable even in other Soviet Muslim republics. Instead, the share

of the Azeris in the overall republican population increased rapidly: in the 1970s it had grown from 67 percent to 78 percent. This was the result of not only natural population growth but also of the steady emigration of Russians and Armenians, which turned into a mass movement in the 1970s-1980s. The relative importance of all these communities changed, and rapid Azerbaijanization took place (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984: 40-41; Altstadt 1992: 165, 184; Swietochowski 1995: 181-182).

At the same time, the industrial growth of Azerbaijan was arrested, and in the 1950s-1970s, it seemed backward in comparison with other Soviet republics. The contrast with Georgia and Armenia was especially instructive, where the average income was growing almost twice as fast as in neighboring Azerbaijan. As a result, the living standard was much lower in Azerbaijan than elsewhere in Transcaucasia. At the same time, due to the oil industry, the contribution of Azerbaijan to USSR development was much higher than what it received back from the center. As a result, the fast growth of the population and its indigenization did not correspond to the infrastructure, which looked less advanced in comparison with other regions of the country (Swietochowski 1995: 179-181)¹⁶.

In 1969-1982, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was headed by Heydar Aliiev, the former chief of the KGB, who dated his career at this organization to 1941 (Karaulov 1990: 248)¹⁷. He made radical changes in the composition of the bureaucracy and ever since, all the administrative and Party elite (except the second secretary of the Communist Party, whose position was always to be held by a Russian) were of Azeri origin (Swietochowski 1995: 183). As a rule, they were relatives, as Aliiev's staff policy appreciated local kin connections. This policy evidently reflected the Azeri attitude towards identity being focused on place of birth and kinship relations. Clanship prevailed over national unity, and this explains, on the face of it, the odd fact that none of the changes has affected language policy (Furman 1994: 150, 153). Intensive education in Russian continued, and more and more Azeris began to consider Russian their second native language. All of this engendered the grievance of the intellectual elite – the poets and writers recalled the national roots, native landscapes, sources of their native Turkic tongue and pre-Muslim past (Altstadt 1992: 186-191).

The latter became especially important, since with the growth of literacy and historical knowledge the past became the basic source of Azeri identity. Historians began to look back to remote periods such as Caucasian Albania and the Middle Ages, attempting to identify their own ancestors and their great deeds in those places and times. Albanian and Persian rulers and poets began to be identified with the Azeris. In the late 1950s – early 1960s, the three-volume "History of Azerbaijan" was published, in which the ancient population of Media-Atropatene was represented as the foundation for the formation of the Azeri people, and Turkification was dated to the 4th – 6th centuries A.D. Historians began to study extensively the history of the medieval states in the Azerbaijan territory. All these states were interpreted as being "Azeri" (Altstadt 1992: 173-174)¹⁸.

Freedom of speech came to Azerbaijan only after Heydar Aliiev was dismissed

in 1987 from the position of first deputy chairman of the USSR Soviet of Ministers. At that very time, the Armenians began to discuss publicly the previously taboo Karabagh theme. The first petition on that issue, signed by hundreds of thousands of Armenians, was sent to Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1987 (Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutaflan 1994: 148). In November 1987, after a speech by the Academician A. G. Aganbegian in Paris, the Karabagh issue assumed a high profile in the world media. This was echoed in the regional media as well. Aganbegian stated that Karabagh was the "historical territory of Armenia". His opponents, though – the national poet of Azerbaijan and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR, B. M. Vakhbazade, and the chairman of the Department of the Azerbaijan history of Azerbaijan State University, S. S. Alijarov – claimed in their "Open Letter" that Karabagh was an integral part of Caucasian Albania. They said its population was the foundation for the formation of the Azeri people. They cited the Karabagh khanate run by the Turks, and emphasized that the mass settlement of the region by Armenians occurred at the initiative of Russian authorities after 1828. The letter stated that the territorial issue had already been resolved in the early 1920s, and it made no sense to come back to it once again. The letter was first published in "Azerbaijan" magazine in February 1988, and, later on, was extensively referred to by Azeri intellectuals, who used it for anti-Armenian propaganda (Vahabzade, Aliyarov 1988. For that see Altstadt 1992: 195-196).

In February 1988, a mass Armenian movement was born in Armenia and NKAR¹⁹). The situation has greatly exacerbated after the Armenian pogrom in Sumgait of February 27-29, 1988, in which Azeri refugees of Armenia took an active part. Then a mass exodus of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azeris from Armenia commenced. In the summer, the Supreme Soviets of both republics exchanged angry statements: Armenians demanded that the NKAR should join Armenia, and the Azeris protested against the violation of the borders of a sovereign republic and suggested the improvement of socio-economic conditions within the NKAR. On July 12, the Regional Soviet of the NKAR declared the breakaway of the Azerbaijan SSR. After that, Moscow had to establish a special commission, headed by A. N. Volsky, but these actions were immediately called pro-Armenian by the Azeris (Altstadt 1992: 196-199).

On November 12, 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR decided that Azerbaijan should retain sovereignty over Nagorny Karabagh. From late November, mass meetings were organized in various areas of Azerbaijan and especially in Baku. Some of the orators demanded the protection of the natural environment from pollution, some of them called for the establishment of a People's Front. The meeting in the central square of Baku lasted until December 4, when people were forced by the police to leave the place. A state of emergency was maintained in various regions of Azerbaijan for several months. In the meantime, more than 140 thousand refugees had poured into Azerbaijan by the end of 1988, which presented a grave problem to the authorities (Altstadt 1992: 200-203). On January 12, 1989, a

new decision was made in the center to introduce direct rule by Moscow over the NKAR.

In the spring of 1989, the Azerbaijan People's Front (APF) was created, and Azerbaijan authorities officially recognized it in October. It was headed by Baku intellectuals who put their greatest emphasis on social and cultural issues. The historian, A. G. Aliev (Elchibey, 1948-2000), who was continuously prosecuted by the Soviet authorities for nationalism, was elected its first president²⁰. The People's Front advocated the extension of Azerbaijan sovereignty within the USSR, the establishment of true democracy – including protection of human rights, protection of the natural environment, and guarantees for the unrestricted development of the cultures and languages of all ethnic groups (Altstadt 1992: 205). In the meantime, armed clashes began between the Armenian and Azeri communities in the NKAR. Gorbachev's decree of November 28, 1989, demanding the restoration of order, did not meet a positive response on any side.

At the same time, historic literature became very important, both publicly and politically. Numerous pamphlets on Karabagh history were published, as well as volumes of historic documents. Pre-revolutionary anti-Armenian pamphlets by such authors as the Russian chauvinist Velichko were reprinted in Baku as well. Azeri authors emphasized that Karabagh was the Motherland of Azeri music and poetry, and that many Azeri writers, poets, singers and musicians had been born there. This was the background for the revival of national culture and values. Interest in the all-Turkic past was growing increasingly intense, and Azeri nationalists recalled pan-Turkism. Significantly, this lively discourse entirely ignored religious issues. True, Islam continued to play an important role in domestic life, but it was not a factor in political discussions (Altstadt 1992: 207-209).

On December 1, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR declared the NKAR an integral part of the "United Republic of Armenia". In response, the Azeri commission of the NKAR was established on December 4 to supercede that of Volsky. Armed clashes continued to occur in Karabagh, and, in the end of December, anti-Communist meetings commenced in Nakhjivan, Djelalabad, and Lenkoran'. On December 31, 1989, an excited crowd led by the leader of the local branch of the APF, Nemat Panakhly, destroyed boundary constructions along the entire 70 km section of the Soviet-Iranian border and opened a direct path to Iranian Azerbaijan. There were calls for the unification of the northern and southern Azerbaijanians (Altstadt 1992: 211-212; Gafarly 1999).

On January 6-7, 1990, the APF conference was held in Baku, whose declarations encroached upon the prerogatives of the CPA and the SS AzSSR. Soon after, the local APF branch took power at Lenkoran' by its own hand. On January 13-14, 1990, bloody clashes occurred between Azeris and Armenians in Baku, which cost several dozen lives. On January 20, Soviet regular troops were brought to Baku with instructions to have done with the APF. Several hundred casualties were the result, and many leaders of the APF were arrested (for details, see Altstadt 1992: 213-219).

The January events in Baku marked a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan – trust in the center was undermined forever in Azeri eyes, and the Azeri Communists were in an uneasy position. The authority of the APF had grown. Under these conditions, the CPA AzSSR attempted to change its slogans, and borrowed many points from the APF nationalist program. The election of the first president of Azerbaijan was held with these slogans filling the air, and the First secretary of the CPA AzSSR, Ayaz Mutalibov, won the election. Meanwhile, after January 1990 the APF shifted to a more radical position; it now picked up anti-Communist slogans and made the achievement of independence its main political goal. It also demanded the abolition of the NKAR, for the sake of state integrity (Altstadt 1992: 220-225).

The rapid escalation of the Karabagh conflict caused the downfall of President Mutalibov, and new elections on July 7, 1992, granted victory to the democrat, Elchibey. At the same time, his romantic ideas about pan-Turkism and the unification of both Azerbaijanians did not respect the ongoing political process. They irritated both former Communist apparatchiks, who still maintained power and resisted the transition to the market economy, and the extreme rightists who called for decisive actions in Karabagh. Meanwhile, Elchibey's chief competitor, the former Communist leader, Heydar Aliiev, was strengthening his position in his native Nakhjivan. In the end of 1992, he established the New Azerbaijani Party (Yeni Azerbaijan) whose program emphasized a transition to a market economy and the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan. By mid-summer 1993, economic collapse and military defeat in Karabagh put an end to this confrontation. On June 15, the Azerbaijani parliament elected Heydar Aliiev as its leader, and on June 18 Elchibey voluntarily left office and took refuge in Nakhjivan (Goldenberg 1994: 119-126).

In the meantime, the Azerbaijani political ship sprang a second leak after Karabagh; the Talyshes, who lived in the southwest Caspian Sea area around Lenkoran' and Astary, revolted. During the Soviet era the Talyshes were forcefully impacted by intensive Turkification, which caused them to develop separatist sentiments. Perestroika gave birth to illusions about the possibility of positive changes. The Talyshes began to issue their own newspapers, the cultural association "Avesta" emerged, and the Talysh National Party was established, aimed at the restoration of Talysh autonomy. The leaders of the Lenkoran' branch of the ANF, Colonel Ali Akram Hummatov and the poet Ali Nasir, included a demand for a Talysh Autonomous Republic into the ANF program. After Elchibey, who emphasized a pan-Turkic attitude, came to power, Hummatov broke off relations with the ANF and headed the Talysh movement. When the military-political environment deteriorated in May-June 1993, Hummatov and his followers took decisive action and on June 21 they declared the establishment of the Talysh Mugan Republic. On August 7, the People's Mejlis held in Lenkoran' approved this. However, by August 24 the Talysh movement was suppressed, their leaders were arrested, and the Party for the Equality of the Azerbaijani peoples (the former

Talysh National Party) was dissolved (Abduragimov 1995: 604-605; Goldenberg 1994: 128; van der Leeuw 2000: 180). Nonetheless, some Azeri experts warn that the “Talysh factor” might work in the future, under unstable political conditions (Mamedov 2000: 36).

CHAPTER 8

THE SEARCH FOR HISTORICAL CONCEPTS, AND MAJOR POLITICS

Having come into being, a new state has to appeal to history in order to legitimize its right to exist, somehow showing it has deep roots and a continuous historical tradition. Azerbaijan did not fail to follow this common path. Since its birth, the historians in the new state persistently demonstrated their restless interest in the early and medieval history of Azerbaijan, searching for the roots of both the nation and its statehood (Altstadt 1992: 173-174).

At first, the history of Azerbaijan was referred to mainly to achieve pragmatic goals dealing with the establishment of state borders. That issue already had a high profile in the spring of 1918, just after the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved. In order to claim contested territories, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan referred to historical evidence. At that time, its officer, A. Shchepotiev, put forward the following arguments. He identified the “Azerbaijani Turks” with the Turkic-speaking population in general and traced their genealogy to the Seljuqs. Thus, he had no doubt that their ancestors were newcomers in the eastern Transcaucasia in the 11th century and that they forced out the former inhabitants, who spoke some North Caucasian language (he called them the Lezghins, keeping in mind the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania). While emphasizing Islam, and Turkic less, Shchepotiev depicted a pattern of continuous settlement by a “culturally-economically-domestically homogeneous Muslim population” from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea (he included the Iranian-speaking Kurds and Tats, and Georgian-speaking Ajars and Ingiloi in this) who were separated by Armenian enclaves into eastern and western parts. He complained that, in order to weaken the Turkic-Muslim influence in the Caucasus, the Russian authorities, on the one hand, included some Muslim areas into Christian provinces and other administrative units, and on the other hand, resettled Christians (most of all Armenians) where Muslim Turks had formerly lived. Instead, he seemed to appreciate the former Persian influence as if the latter almost made all the Transcaucasian and Daghestani territories a homogeneous “cultural unity”.

On this basis he came to the following conclusion: “The territory inhabited by the Azeri people together with closely linked small pockets of Kurdish, Persian, Ajar, Ingiloi and highland, in particular, Lezghin elements characterized by the same domestic, intellectual, religious, and cultural levels of lifestyle, is restricted

geographically mainly in the following way: to the east by the Caspian Sea, to the North by the eastern hilly flanks of the Daghestani Mountains in the Derbent direction, in the Middle Caucasus by the middle of the Caucasus ridge, spurs of the Shirak (Kara-Dara) mountains and Kura River canyons between Tiflis and the Karayaz steppe, in the northwest by the Trialeti range, Atskhur range and the Black Sea". He treated all the aforementioned boundaries as "natural borders" that must include a uniform state, based on an ethnographic and historical entity. He excluded only the Armenian population of the Yerevan region, putting it outside the outlined "natural borders" (Shchepotiev 1990: 43-45)²¹). Having claimed territories in neighboring Armenia and Georgia, Shchepotiev quite purposefully identified the Turks with the Muslims and made no distinctions between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

This trick made it possible to claim the Ajaria, Akhaltsikhe (Meskheta) and Akhalkalaki (Djavakheti) regions of Georgia, populated by Muslims. Indeed, in 1918 local inhabitants demonstrated anti-Georgian attitudes and even made an attempt to establish a Muslim republic of the southwestern Caucasus in mid-1918, which would embrace the Kars region, the Artvin unit of the Batumi region and the Akhaltsikhe unit of Tiflis province. This arbitrary state was soon demolished by British and Georgian troops (Shchepotiev 1990: 58-59). This, at first sight insignificant historical event left a deep scar in Georgian memory, and later played a big role in the life of the Meskheta Turks. It is instructive that Shchepotiev used the definition "Azerbaijani Turks" for the Turkic-speaking population of Azerbaijan. Besides, he referred to their transhumance as a factor in the demand for highland seasonal pastures to be included in the territory of the sovereign state – a factor that would come to play a crucial role in the Karabagh conflict. In his report, Karabagh was listed among other "indigenous Turkic territories", and its Alpine meadows were declared an integral part of the Turkic subsistence economy. Shchepotiev recognized that Armenian settlements had flourished there before the Turks have arrived, but he maintained that after the transhumance system had been introduced almost all the Armenians had left. In his view, the return of the Armenians was the result of the generous politics of the local khans in the 18th century and, even more, of the Russian incentive which resulted in the installation of a Christian population here in the early 19th century. While pretending to base his position on reliable demographic data, Shchepotiev in fact manipulated them: he opposed the Armenians not just to the Turks but to the Muslims in general, which increased the number of the latter with the addition of the Kurds. At the same time, he reduced the share of the Karabagh Armenians, while arguing that seasonal Armenian workers from southern Russia were illegally included into their number by the census. Moreover, when he talked about the first Turkic migration into Karabagh he claimed that the Turks had forced out the "Lezghins" (i.e. Albanians. V. Sh.), rather than the Armenians (Shchepotiev 1990: 47, 54-56). This argument dealing with the ethnic identity of the pre-Turkic population of Caucasian Albania would be fated to serve as a key issue of Armenian-Azeri historical discourse

during the Soviet era (Saroyan 1996: 406-407).

One of Shchepotiev's main arguments read that "reference to historical rights from earlier centuries, when ethnic composition was strikingly different, is incorrect". He cited what had occurred in the eastern part of Kakheti, where radical ethnic changes had been observed since the 15th century. First, the Lezhgins invaded the area, and then the Iranians devastated it. As a result, the majority of the Georgians were pushed to the west; those who stayed were converted to Islam, becoming the foundation population of contemporary Ingiloi. Then the Lezhgins and Turks became the dominant majority. Thus, while emphasizing that the region was populated mainly by Muslims, Shchepotiev rejected any Georgian claims to its territories. His arguments against Armenian territorial claims were the same (Shchepotiev 1990: 48-49, 59-60). That is why in this particular case he chose to ignore references to early history. At the same time, early history was precisely what both Georgians and Armenians treated as decisive in their arguments. Moreover, while calling Armenians recent newcomers in some areas of eastern Transcaucasia, Shchepotiev himself had to refer to a much earlier past, when the Turks were the dominant population there (Shchepotiev 1990: 54-55).

Thus, history was used in an instrumental way by politicians in the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. Yet, despite the establishment of Baku University, a local modern historical school was not created during that brief period of time. This mission was passed on to the Soviet epoch, and it had to start almost from the very beginning. Indeed, modern local historians were lacking in Azerbaijan before 1917 (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 4). Some archaeological investigations were carried out in pre-revolutionary Azerbaijan, but they were irregular. Only graves were studied; general knowledge of early cultures and their chronology was non-existent and the Azeris themselves did not take part in these studies (Passek, Latynin 1926).

Changes came about in the early 1920s. Initially, the Oriental Faculty of Azerbaijan State University was the main center for the study of the history of Azerbaijan, conducted mainly through investigation of early chronicles. At the time of the Democratic Republic, Museum of the Native Land (Istiglal) was established, which was later renamed the Museum of History of the Peoples of Azerbaijan. It was based initially on archaeological materials collected in the 1870s by the Society of Admirers of Caucasian Archaeology, and brought to Baku from Tbilisi just after the revolution. It is worth noting that in the last Soviet decades they preferred to begin the Museum's genealogy from the "Muzekskurs" – museum-excursion department, established at Narkompros (the Ministry of Education) of the Azerbaijan SSR in June 1920 (Azizbekova 1973). In 1923, an Archaeological Committee was established also in Baku at Narkompros; in 1927 it was reorganized into the Azerbaijani Committee for the Protection of Art and Historical Monuments (Azkomtaris, and later on – AzTsUOP) (Klimov et al. 1940: 67; Djafarzade 1945: 126). In 1921-1922, there was an attempt to establish a separate Institute of Oriental Studies that included the Archaeological Society, but this project failed for lack of

appropriate specialists.

In fact, the Society for the Exploration and Study of Azerbaijan (SESA) proved to be the main center for the study of history, archaeology and ethnography in Azerbaijan. It was established in Baku at Narkompros in May 1923 through the initiative of a local Party functionary, a member of the Control Commission of the CC CPA, A. R. Zifel'dt-Simumiagi (Khalilov 1985)²²). The SESA included, in particular, an ethnographic section that was to carry out philological, ethnographic and archaeological studies. In September 1924, the SESA organized the First All-Azerbaijani Congress of Local Studies, which was a great success. Yet, after that, SESA activity decreased, especially after May 1925, when it was placed under the authority of the Azerbaijan government, which demanded it study mainly contemporary issues (Zifel'dt 1925: 107-110). A successful new period commenced in the late 1920s, when Academician I. I. Meshchaninov began to collaborate with the SESA. The SESA has played a significant role in the development of the historical profession in Azerbaijan. In October 1929, it was granted the status of the Azerbaijani State Research Institute, and in 1932 the Azerbaijani unit of the Transcaucasian branch of the AN SSSR was established on its foundation, and this included the Department of History, Ethnography and Archaeology. In 1935, this Department was reorganized into the Institute of History, Ethnography, Archaeology and Literature in the Azerbaijan branch of the AN SSSR. Finally, a separate Institute of History of the Azerbaijan branch of the AN SSSR was established, after a new reorganization in 1939 (Klimov et al. 1940: 67; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1965: 3; Buniatov 1982: 53-54; Sumbatzade 1987: 78).

At various times, well-known Soviet scholars (N. A. Samoilovich, V. V. Bartold, I. I. Meshchaninov) collaborated with the SESA, but Azeris were in the minority there. This obviously affected the nature of academic projects. In respect to history, the SESA focused on the most ancient and early medieval periods; Muslim history was far from popular. For example, the Academician Meshchaninov was most interested in the Urartian period, and recommended that the Azeris study cuneiform in order to search for traces of Urartian raids in the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers, and carry out archaeological investigations. Basing his conclusions on very scant cuneiform records, he assumed that a high culture developed in the southern parts of Azerbaijan during the Urartian era: urban life flourished, palaces and temples were erected. All of this, he believed, was accomplished by local inhabitants speaking East-Caucasian languages close to that of the Udins (Meshchaninov 1925). In May-June 1926, he headed small-scale archaeological investigations in Nagorny Karabagh and Nakhjivan. Although he did not find any cuneiform documents there, he was very enthusiastic and promoted the emergence of archaeology in Azerbaijan (Meshchaninov 1926; Sumbatzade 1987: 83-84). In particular, the first Azeri archaeologist and ethnographer, A. Alekperov, and a future well-known archaeologist, then a student, I. Djafarzade, began their scholarly careers in his archaeological team in 1926 (Meshchaninov 1927a: 105).

In the Soviet era, the first volume of the general history of Azerbaijan was

completed by Rashidbek Izmailov. It came out in Azeri in Baku in 1923 and covered all the epochs beginning with the earliest and continuing up to the beginning of the 20th century. The book was a mere compilation, but this was not the main reason why it proved to be unacceptable to the Soviet authorities in Azerbaijan. Its worst feature was that the author ignored the Marxist idea of the class struggle, was sympathetic with the pan-Turkic attitude and justified the policies of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (Ibragimov, Tokarzhovsky 1964: 9).

The reliance of the Soviet bureaucracy on local Azeri historians was undermined. In the 1920s, Russian scholars played a major role in the development of history, archaeology and ethnography in Azerbaijan, and they were the tutors of the future local professionals. In order to train students, the School of Azerbaijan Studies was established at the SESA.

In general, during the 1920s a very simplified version of the history of Azerbaijan was widespread in Soviet popular literature. A brief review of this history, which was presented in the popular series "Our Union", read that the country was a tasty morsel of territory that was persistently contested by the mighty neighboring states. The natives were represented as primitive, weak and helpless people who suffered subjugation by aliens more frequently than not. Their fate was miserable: sometimes they were slaughtered by Turkic nomads, sometimes they were Turkified, and only a few managed to find refuge somewhere in the hills (Bialetskii et al. 1929b: 8-13).

Needless to say, the Azeris were less than satisfied with this drastically cut and highly simplified view of their past. The republican authorities did their best to recruit well-trained specialists to study and to teach local history. In the beginning of the 1920s, well known Russian scholars, including the Academician V. V. Bartold, were giving lecture courses in the history of Azerbaijan in Azerbaijan University and other Baku schools. Professor Ye. A. Pakhomov was one of those whose lectures given at the Baku Institute of Public Education were issued as a separate booklet. In his lectures, Pakhomov emphasized the extremely complicated ethnic composition of the republic, which had developed over many centuries. He demonstrated that the territory of the future republic had witnessed many mass invasions and resettlements, and language and religion replacements, which had caused identity changes. Albanians who adopted Christianity turned into Armenians, and Persians who shifted to Turkic identified themselves with the Turks.

Pakhomov located Albania north of the Kura River and represented it as a weak state, dependent now on Rome, and now on Persia. Albania grew in importance only under the Sussanians, who made it a stronghold against the northern steppe nomads. Yet, Albania was unable to avoid nomadic invasions, and was gradually infiltrated by Turkic tribes that in the long term brought about the dominance of Turkic speech there. However, that was a long slow process and it had not ended even by the 11th century, when the Seljuq Turks ran the country.

Quite the opposite, while being highly affected by the Persian culture, the Seljuqs occupied themselves with the promotion of Persian. Really rapid Turkification took place only during the Mongol period, when the great bulk of the population shifted to Turkic language. Yet, even at that time, due to its complex ethnic, religious and social composition, the country retained its multi-lingual nature. Only in the 16th century under the Safavi Dynasty was Persian finally forced out by Turkic. Nonetheless, the author pointed out, the eastern Caspian Sea region never underwent complete population replacement; regardless of the language and cultural shifts the indigenous inhabitants kept experiencing in their own land (Pakhomov 1923: 9-21).

Even more influential in Baku were two courses on the history of Azerbaijan (one a brief history and the other one more extensive) completed by the Russian historian and archaeologist, V. M. Sysoev (Sysoev 1925a, 1925b). He treated the history of Azerbaijan not as an ethnic history but mainly as the history of various political bodies that differed from each other in language and cultural traditions²³.

Meanwhile, the very term “Azerbaijan” provided good opportunities to deepen the local past and construct an historical continuity. Sysoev remarked that the earliest inhabitants of Azerbaijan, the Caspians, were included in the Persian Empire under King Cyrus, and even earlier they were mentioned in the Urartians inscriptions by the names Etiuns (Udins?) and Uluani (Albanians?). Sysoev was aware that in respect to their language, the early Albanians differed from the Turks and were related to some Caucasian highlanders; yet, it was not clear to whom in particular. Nonetheless, their state was situated in the territory of Azerbaijan. Referring to the then known archaeological data, Sysoev located the Albanian culture in the southwestern part of Soviet Azerbaijan, between the Kura River and the Armenian border (Sysoev 1925b: 29).

In Sysoev’s books, Azerbaijan was a political and geographical rather than an ethnic concept. Like Pakhomov, he demonstrated that language shifts had occurred several times there during its history: initially Arranian (Albanian) language was popular, as it developed side by side with Persian; then, Arabic became the state language; and with the dominance of the Seljuqs in the 11th – 12th centuries Turkic gradually won over. That was no wonder, since the Caspian lowland served as a permanent corridor over which various groups used to move from north to south and vice-versa. In medieval times, Turkic was used by the general public, Arabic dominated in the religious sphere, the monophysite Armenians spoke Armenian, and the highlanders retained their own vernaculars (Sysoev 1925a: 34-35, 1925b: 78. Cf. Pakhomov 1923: 18). At the same time, the complex history of Azerbaijan provided unrestricted resources for manipulation of historical data what will be discussed further on.

Suffice it to say here that one beneficial field for that sort of activity was the history of Caucasian Albania, with its highly heterogeneous population and its fluctuating frontiers. This was clearly demonstrated by the Academician A. Ye. Krymsky, who worked in Kiev. He located Caucasian Albania on both sides of the

Lower Kura River. The Armenians called it “Agvan” (“Alvank”), and the Persians and Arabs – “Arran”. Greco-Roman authors associated the Albanian Kingdom with only the left bank of the Kura River, and included its right bank in the Armenian state. Yet, it was unclear to Krymsky when precisely the Albanian dynasty spread its jurisdiction to the right bank of the Kura River – in the end of the 1st century A.D. or only in the Sussanian era, perhaps in the 5th century when the united Armenian Kingdom disintegrated. The former Armenian power over Artsakh, Utik and Paytakaran was recorded by Movses Kagankatvatsi in his “History of the Agvans” (10th century) and by “Armenian geography” at the end of the 7th century. During Sussanian times, the Albanian state not only covered both banks of the Kura River but also had already moved its capital to the right bank. At that time, the name “Alban” became associated mainly with the right bank of the river. For the Arabs at the very end of the 1st Millennium A.D. the term “Arran” had a broad meaning and covered extensive territory between Derbent and Tiflis. True, some of them used the term “both Arrans”, bearing in mind that there were left and right bank portions. Later on, the term “Arran” was associated only with the right bank of the river, and the left bank was now called Shirvan (Krymsky 1934: 289-295). Although Krymsky’s view did not avoid some minor errors, his general approach was developed to their benefit by contemporary scholars (for example, see Novosel’tsev 1979; 1991).

The history of the Christian Church in Albania was no less complex. It is generally thought that the Albanian King Urnair introduced Christianity there in the 4th century. However, Byzantine Orthodoxy was adopted on the left bank of the Kura River, and Armenian-Gregorian monophysiticism was widespread on the right bank to the extent that in the 6th century the Agvanian catholicos attempted to banish the Orthodox beliefs as “heresy”. Later on, ca. 700 A.D., the Albanian-Armenian Church council of the right bank of the Kura River condemned the Orthodox Church, which held a strong position on the left bank (Krymsky 1934: 294-295, 299).

Whereas the history of Albania was of no more than academic interest to Krymsky, it had quite a different import in Soviet Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani Marxist ethnography that emerged in the republic at the turn of the 1930s made the first attempt to nationalize the history of the Albanians. Being based on the ideas of the Academician Marr²⁴), young Azeri Marxists were advocating the principle of autochthonism. They argued that ethnic groups that were developing in a uniform natural environment and in close contact with each other were fated to integrate into a uniform “historical entity”. They maintained that the Kurds, Turks and Armenians of Karabagh were an example of such an entity. Coming out against Armenian and Turkic nationalism, they recommended forgetting the search for ancestors somewhere in the Altai Mountains or on the banks of the Lake Van. No, they argued, both peoples are of local Karabagh origin and share the same culture (Aleksperov, Vartapetov 1932: 191-192). At the same time, they did all they could to avoid discussing the issue of the crucial language and cultural differences between

these peoples, let alone the reasons of those differences. Evidently, a new Utopia of harmonious brotherhood of all peoples was building; and one had to sacrifice real cultural differences and ethnic authenticity for the sake of that.

A. K. Alekperov (1885-1937), the first Soviet Azeri archaeologist and ethnographer, was one of these young authors. He was born in Baku, became an orphan at an early age, and was trained at Baku High School and the Kiev Commercial Institute. Finally, in 1926, he graduated from the Oriental Department of the Historical-Philological Faculty of Azerbaijan State University. The prominent Soviet scholars, V. V. Bartold, N. Ya. Marr, and I. I. Meshchaninov were among his teachers. They not only aroused his interest in both the remote past and the traditional culture of Azerbaijan, but they also taught him to respect ethnic minorities. Since 1919, Alekperov had occupied himself with local studies, and five years later he became one of the most active members of the SESA and a permanent participant in the archaeological and ethnographic studies organized by the latter. In 1927-1928, he collaborated with the Museum of the History of the Peoples of Azerbaijan. In 1937, he was appointed the chairman of the Department of the History of Material Culture at the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Alekperov 1960: 5-6; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 15, 27). However, he did not occupy this position very long; he was soon arrested and shot to death.

Following the spirit of the times, Alekperov came out against great-power chauvinism and nationalism. He was by no means fascinated by the pan-Turkic idea. He believed that it was highly erroneous to argue for the arrival of some "Turks with pure blood" as if they had brought about high culture in Transcaucasia. No, he maintained, there was already a highly developed local culture in Azerbaijan before the arrival of the Turks. Agvaniia, one of the earliest states in Transcaucasia, had emerged there, and had been built up by the indigenous inhabitants. The Turks, he said, had infiltrated Azerbaijan over the centuries, merging with the natives. That was how, by the 14th – 15th centuries, an Azeri population had emerged which integrated remnants of Iranian and Arab tribes. That is why their culture was very heterogeneous; an issue that has to be the object of special studies (Alekperov 1960: 75-77). It is easy to see that Alekperov based his views on the autochthonist approach that was popular in contemporary Soviet scholarship. This approach had governed Azerbaijani scholarship ever since.

The Marxist view of the ethnogenesis of the Azeri people was developed as a response to the pan-Turkic attitude fashionable in Azerbaijan in the 1920s. The latter was promoted especially by the All-Union Turkological Congress held in Baku in early 1926. At the Congress, the leading Soviet specialists rehabilitated such terms as "Turks" and "Turk-Tatars". Azeri intellectuals began to think of the establishment of a "Turkic-Tatar" Research Institute and a Union of "Turkic-Tatar" poets, and even of an International Bureau of Turkology under the aegis of the USSR. They called for the introduction of Turkic education (Choban-zade 1925). In brief, the emergence of Turkic republics within the USSR and a Turkological

Congress, let alone the successful development of neighboring Turkey, made for the fast growth of pan-Turkic identity.

All of this gradually began to alarm the Soviet bureaucracy, which was afraid of Turkic nationalism. They were watching with growing anxiety for the flourishing of pan-Turkic ideas among Turkic émigrés abroad (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 9). One such concept was advocated by Mohammed Amin Rasulzada (1884-1955), a former “Musavat” leader, who, while in Turkey, completed an essay on the origins of the Azeri people. It was published in Istanbul in 1928. Its author put into question the idea then popular in Turkey about the autochthonous formation of the Turkish people in the territory of early Asia Minor and Transcaucasia. Instead, he described numerous migrations of Turkic nomads from the Asiatic steppes, that one by one flooded the Caucasus in the late 1st – beginning of the 2nd Millennia A.D. He put special emphasis on the Seljuq migration in the 11th century, when mass Turkification began. The process of Turkification continued for a few centuries and ended only in the time of the Mongols in the 13th – 14th centuries. During the Safavi period (1501-1722), new Turkic tribes arrived in Azerbaijan. In brief, in Rasulzada’s view, the Turks played the crucial role in the formation of the Azeri people; Albanians were excluded from this process because they were Christians (Rasulzade 1990. For that see Astourian 1994: 62-63)²⁵). The Soviet Azeris could not accept this concept because first, it stressed their Turkic origins and thus made them helpless before the campaigns against pan-Turkism launched in the USSR, and second, it depicted them as recent migrants, thus depriving them of the first-settler argument that they needed so much against the territorial claims of the Armenians and the Iranians.

As a result of the struggle against pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, the terms “Turks” and “Islam” had already become unpopular in the USSR by the end of the 1920s, and if they were used, it was only with negative connotations. Now these terms were associated with reactionary bourgeois ideology and attempts to dissolve Azeri authenticity in a Turkic sea governed by the Turkish people (Alekperov 1960: 74-75). During the period from 1925 to 1940, about 100 archaeological and ethnographic studies were carried out, 70 of them during the last five years before World War II. Archaeological investigations were focused on the prehistoric, early historic and early medieval past. Only a few of them dealt with the Muslim period (studies of mosques, palaces, and the famous palace of the Shirvan Shahs in Baku). Interestingly, their investigators managed to avoid such terms as “Turks” and “Islam”; Muslim monuments were considered only as a valuable cultural heritage, and their religious importance was ignored (for example, see Guseinov 1943; Djafarzade 1945; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964).

CHAPTER 9

THE MEDIAN TEMPTATION AND SOVIET PATRIOTISM

In 1934, the Historical Faculty was opened at Azerbaijan State University (ASU) and its first graduates received diplomas in 1939. This occurred against a background of important political changes. In 1936, Azerbaijan was granted the status of a full Soviet Socialist Republic, and it became necessary for it to have its own distinct history, permitting it to distance itself, first from all the other Turks in order to avoid association with pan-Turkism, and second from Shi'a Iran in order to avoid the accusation of pan-Islamism. At the same time, in accordance with the Soviet doctrine being especially intolerant of "stranger-peoples", the Azeris did need the status of an indigenous people, but for that they had to prove their autochthonous origin. In a letter written in 1988, targeting Armenian territorial claims, the Azeri intellectuals themselves demonstrated what an important ethnopolitical meaning their view of ethnic history had for them. First, the emphasis on the autochthonous origin was their response to Armenian claims that the Azeris were by no means an "indigenous nation", second, their rich and substantially ancient historical tradition was used to encourage the position of Iranian Azeris, who had been deprived of any right to develop their language and culture. Indeed, the Azeris always felt that the attitude toward them as newcomers brought them under threat of losing their lands and being deported, as had occurred, for example, in 1948-1953 when quite a number of Azeris were removed from the territory of Armenia (Vahabzade, Aliyarov 1988)²⁶.

In brief, Azerbaijan was in great need of its own history, and in 1940-1941 the Department of History of Azerbaijan was established and a course in the history of Azerbaijan was introduced to the curriculum of the Historical Faculty of the ASU (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 27). By that time, both aforementioned Iranian and Armenian factors had been conducive to rapid Azerbaijanization of historical heroes and historical political formations in the territory of Azerbaijan. In particular, in 1938 the 800-year anniversary of Nizami was celebrated, and he was declared a great Azeri poet (Istoriia 1939: 88-91). In fact, he was a Persian poet and that was no wonder, since the Persians accounted for the entire urban population in those days (Diakonov 1995: 731). This was recognized in all the encyclopedias published in Russia before the 1930s, and only in 1939 did the Big Soviet Encyclopedia called Nizami a "great Azeri poet" for the first time (Cf. Brokgauz,

Efron 1897: 58; Granat 1917: 195; BSE 1939: 94). In the 1940s the Safavi Dynasty became Azerbaijani rather than Turkic, let alone Iranian (Altstadt 1992: 159; Astourian 1994: 53).

In the late 1930s, the First Secretary of the CPA, M. D. Baghirov, ordered Azerbaijani historians to write a history of Azerbaijan which would represent the Azeri people as the true indigenous population and break them off from any Turkic roots (Aliiev 1999). Baghirov did not fail to point out that, despite of all the tribal movements that had occurred very frequently in the past, despite conquests and alien political rule, the Azeri people had managed to retain their national culture and native language (for example, see Baghirov 1950: 30). Under the threat of the coming Russification, this idea sounded very powerful. The task was formulated even more clearly by the 17th and 18th Congresses of the CPA held in 1949 and 1951. They required of Azeri historians that they “study such important problems of the history of the Azeri people as the history of Media, and the origins of the Azeri people” (Yampol’sky 1952: 164; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 37). To put it another way, Azerbaijani authorities approved the Azeri origin of the ancient Median population; and scholars had to search for appropriate arguments (Klimov et al. 1940: 68, 70; Yampol’sky 1952: 164-165; Ismailov 1954; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 34, 39-40). On November 5, 1940, the meeting of the Presidium of the Azerbaijan branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences made a clear identification between the “early history of Azerbaijan” and the history of Media (Ob izuchenii 1940. For that see Diakonov 1995: 731; Sumbatzade 1987: 102, 109).

Thus, the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan branch of the AS USSR was obliged to work out a new concept of the history of Azerbaijan, although well-trained specialists were in very short supply (Diakonov 1995: 731). Yet the first version of the history of Azerbaijan was completed by the spring of 1939, and in May, it was discussed at a scholarly meeting of the Section on History and Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Its preliminary version came out in 1939, as the model for a textbook on the history of Azerbaijan for high schools. Its main ideas were that Azerbaijan had been continuously populated since the Stone Age, that the local tribes were by no means backward in relationship to their neighbors, that they fought courageously against all the unwelcome invaders and, despite temporary failures, always retained their sovereignty. Interestingly enough, Media and its role in the development of “early Azeri statehood” was still in low profile, the Albanian theme was almost neglected, and the local inhabitants were called the “Azerbaijanis”, no matter what historical period was being discussed (Istoriia 1939). Thus, the authors identified the people by the region they lived in, and due to that, they felt no need for a special discussion of the formation of the Azeri people. They were also tolerant of the fact that the inhabitants of Artsakh shifted to Armenian, that the clergy wrote in Grabar and that the Seljuq invasion forced the native people to shift to Turkic (Istoriia 1939: 35-36, 72-74, 85). They were much more worried about Islam – they represented it as an alien faith and described the brave “Azeri” struggle against the Arab intruders (Istoriia 1939: 49-

51).

In fact, this volume was the first systematic representation of the history of Azerbaijan completed by Soviet Azerbaijan scholars. In the next revised edition, the authors referred to Mikhail I. Kalinin's speech at the meeting of Party activists held in Moscow in 1940. There he talked of Soviet patriotism and called for appreciation of the "roots of the early history of our people". He also said: "Soviet patriotism is the direct heir of their creative ancestors' activities". He taught them to find out their own historical genealogies and be proud of epic and historical heroes (Kalinin 1940: 4). Following that, the authors of the revised edition of the textbook argued that every Soviet patriot had to know the past of the Azeri people, beginning in the most ancient times (Istoriia 1941: 5).

That was a directive, and it maintained that by no means did the Azeri people emerge in the 19th or 20th centuries, that one had to search for their roots in the remote past and in the territory where they lived nowadays. The textbook emphasized the autochthonous origins of the Azeri people. In order to confirm those, the authors put forward the following arguments. First, they refused to identify the Azeri ancestors with any strangers, and, in contrast to the common Soviet view (for that, see Niessman 1987: 9), excluded language as a main characteristic of a people. It seemed much more important to them to appreciate ethnic territory, and the material and intellectual culture inherited from one's ancestors. Secondly, they devoted no less energy to turning down the role of religion in identity, and pointed out that the Azeris professed different religions before Islam. Finally, they argued that all the groups of newcomers whom Azerbaijan received throughout the centuries were numerically small, were less culturally advanced than the Azeris, and merged rapidly with the local inhabitants, without having any major effect on them. To put it other way, the Azeris were identified with the earliest population of the region, a people who did not change much throughout the centuries, and, thus were the Azeri people provided with eternal existence (Istoriia 1941: 17-18).

Who were the earliest Azeri ancestors, specifically? The authors identified them with the "Medes, Caspians, Albanians and other tribes who lived in the territory of Azerbaijan about three thousand years ago". They argued that the early Azeris surpassed the Persians in the level of their development, and were not much different from the Armenians and Georgians (Istoriia 1941: 8, 17, 21). In particular, the Albanian alphabet, introduced by Mesrob Mashtots (ca. 350-439/440) in the 5th century was called a genuine Azeri alphabet (Istoriia 1941: 42); in this way, the Azeris obtained a tradition of early writing that could compete with those both of Georgia and Armenia. The main messages of the textbook were first that the Soviet Azeris had nothing to learn from the Persians and no reason to grieve the loss of the Iranian cultural tradition. Indeed, the "early Azeri-Median culture had strongly and positively affected the development of the Persian, so-called, Achaemenian culture". In contrast, the Iranian state had only occupied itself with the destruction of the Azeri culture, later on. Second, the Azeris had no reason to have an

inferiority complex with respect to the Armenians and Georgians. Indeed, as the textbook stated, the state was formed among the early Azeris (i.e. Medes! V. Sh.) much earlier than among their ancestors, and Dejok, the king of Media was called the “first known king of Azerbaijan”. Media was said to have been the most powerful state in the ancient Middle East (Istoriia 1941: 21, 23, 25, 27-28).

Thus, the Golden Age of the Azeri people was dated to the 1st Millennium B.C. Later on, a decline took place that was aggravated by the continuous encroachments of the Arabs, Seljuqs, Mongols and other invaders whose activities were painted only in black; there was no question of their making any positive cultural contribution; to the contrary, the intense permanent struggle of the Azeri people against them was emphasized. Persia was depicted as a most harmful agent that persistently attempted to subjugate Azerbaijan. However, the annexation by Russia was treated as a “minor evil” – that was the standard formula then adopted by all Soviet historians (for that, see Tillet 1969).

One of the major themes of the textbook was the courageous age-old Azeri struggle against various conquerors. This trend emerged in Azeri history writing, especially at the time of World War II, when historians were obliged to contribute to the patriotic education of the Soviet people (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1943, 1964: 35-36). Whereas before the war the mystic-religious movement of Babek (9th century) was interpreted with respect to the concept of class struggle as a peasant war against feudalism (Istoriia 1939: 59-66), now it was represented as a national liberation movement against Arab invaders (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1943: 20-27).

The name “Azerbaijan” was correctly related to the name of the Hellenistic ruler Atropat, but (!) following Marr, the authors derived his name from that of “some Azeri tribe” (Istoriia 1941: 31). As far as Nagorny Karabagh was concerned, they emphasized its close economic relationships with the lowlands of Azerbaijan (Istoriia 1941: 38), thus reproducing the very argument that had played a major role in the incorporation of Nagorny Karabagh into Soviet Azerbaijan in the early 1920s.

The next attempt to write down the history of Azerbaijan was made in 1945-1946 when, as we shall see further on, Soviet Azerbaijan was dreaming of its forthcoming unification with its Iranian counterpart. The new version of the “History of Azerbaijan” was completed by the same authors together with additional specialists from the Institute of History of the CPSU, who were responsible for chapters on the most recent history. This version was still based on the concept that the Azeri people were first of all formed out of the earliest inhabitants of eastern Transcaucasia and northwestern Iran, and second, although they had been affected by some more recent invaders (Scythians and others), the influence of the latter was of minor importance. What was new in this volume was the further attempt to extend Azeri history deeper into the past – for this time the Azeri ancestors were identified with the bearers of Bronze Age cultures in the territory of Azerbaijan (Ocherki 1946: 27). However, the main ancestors were still identified as the Medes, who were but complemented by the Caucasian Albanians, as if they had retained old Median traditions even after the latter were subjugated

by the Persians. Nothing was said of the Albanian language or the Albanian writing system, however, or of the role of Turkic or Iranian languages in medieval times. Instead, Nizami was called not only one of the greatest poets in the world, but an Azeri poet; one of his merits was that he knew of and wrote about Russia (Ocherki 1946: 65-67, 69-71)²⁷).

In fact, both volumes in question focused mainly on political history; economic and cultural issues were discussed only in passing and rather formally; ethnic history was not covered at all; and all people who had ever lived in the territory of Azerbaijan were indiscriminately reckoned among the Azeris and contrasted with the Iranians. All of this was done despite the fact that the Medes were an Iranian-speaking people (for that, see Astourian 1994: 54). This autochthonous concept, that claimed all the territories of Azerbaijan including its Iranian region, was openly anti-Iranian and contained a special message in the 1940s. Indeed, after the annexation of extended territories in Europe, Stalin was seriously thinking of Soviet expansion southward. In question was not only the old problem of the straits providing access to the Mediterranean Sea, but also the appropriation of additional territories at the expense of Turkey and Iran (Kuniholm 1980; Chuev 1991: 55-56). The Soviet authorities did their best to recruit traditions of irredentism that manifested themselves from the beginning of the 20th century. Yet there were no academic reasons to confuse the early history of Caucasian Albania and southern Azerbaijan (Atropatene). In the early times as well as in the early medieval period, completely different populations lived there, who had nothing in common – be it culture, social relationships, or language (Novosel'tsev 1991: 197).

The Azeri democrats began to look to Iran quite early. In 1904-1905 the Muslim social-democratic "Hümme't" party was established in Baku. It not only enrolled immigrant workers from Iranian Azerbaijan but also formed a group of them that served as the basis on which the Iranian Communist Party (ICP) grew, later on (Altstadt 1992: 47-48).

In 1941-1946, during the period of the Soviet occupation of northern Iran, an intensive anti-Iranian propaganda campaign was launched there, and attempts were made to awaken Azeri self-awareness and develop an all-Azeri identity. The unification of Iranian Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan, and thus the appropriation of a substantial part of Iranian territory by the USSR, was on the agenda. In order to make their propaganda more effective, Soviet troops in Iran were recruited mainly from among the Azeris, who brought their families with them. It looked as if the "unification" of all the Azeris was coming, much like what had occurred in Byelorussia and the Ukraine in 1939. Gradually, the term "Greater Azerbaijan" became popular. The Azeri wing of the Iranian "Tudeh" people's party began to emphasize ethnic distinctions and the particular interests of the Azeris, and in August 1945 it openly claimed autonomy for southern Azerbaijan and state status for the Azeri language.

In September, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (DPA) was established in Tabriz. It consisted of only those Azeris who formerly collaborated with the ICP.

This party not only claimed autonomy, but also advocated the right of a nation to sovereignty, although, in their rhetoric, its leaders recognized the territorial integrity of Iran. On November 20, 1945, the Constituent Congress of the DPA pointed out that, while having its own history as well as language and cultural traditions, Azerbaijan had every reason to obtain autonomous political status, although without separation from Iran. However, the term “Azeri nation” that was used constantly by DPA leaders contrasted sharply with the official concept of an integrated Iranian nation (*mellat*). In December 1945, southern Azerbaijan was granted the requested autonomy, and it established its own government, the Mejlis. Immediately, reforms of a socialist and nationalist nature were implemented. One of these was the granting of Azeri language state status in the territory of Iranian Azerbaijan. Cultural ties between the two Azerbaijanians were developed, and the Tabriz media disseminated a positive and alluring image of the USSR. Native Azeri vernacular was artificially cleansed of Persian elements, and instead many Russian loan words were welcomed.

Thoughtful observers could not fail to notice that Baghirov personally controlled all the relationships between two Azerbaijanians. At that time, some key political leaders in Iranian Azerbaijan began to consider the perspective of unification with Soviet Azerbaijan. The Tabriz authorities demonstrated their anti-Iranian attitudes increasingly openly. Yet the USSR fell short of their expectations. Soviet troops left Iran in May 1946, and in December, the Iranian regular army was brought into Iranian Azerbaijan. After weak resistance, Azeri autonomy ceased to exist. Its supporters found refuge in the Azerbaijan SSR. The state status of the Azeri language in southern Azerbaijan was abolished (Kolarz 1952: 247; Niessman 1987: 31-35; Swietochowski 1995: 135-162).

All of these developments had a high profile in the Soviet media. At the end of 1945 – early 1946 the central media had been disseminating favorable information about Iranian Azerbaijan. In the late 1940s, a Soviet radio station situated in Transcaucasia called for an Iranian Azeri revolt against the Shah. Interestingly, his power was represented as a “foreign yoke”. This was the term that had been used in Soviet textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan, to describe the long Iranian presence in Transcaucasia. In 1947-1950, Soviet Azeri writers and poets wrote about the unity of an Azeri nation that was artificially divided by the Arax River. Their works were frequently highly praised, which demonstrated what a significant role the pan-Azeri issue played in Soviet external policy (Niessman 1987: 36-37, 42-45; Swietochowski 1995: 165-167). Yet, while analyzing all these events long afterwards, the Soviet Azeri historians avoided discussing the crucial role of the Soviet Union (for example, see Nuriev 1988).

In Iran, the “Azeri issue” was seen quite differently; national unity (*mellat*) was identified with the religious community that embraced all Shi’as, regardless of language or ethnic origins. Until recently, only Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians were considered minorities there (Tapper 1989: 234, 237). The Azeri distinctions were explained with reference to the Mongol conquest, which had caused the

Turkification of the former Iranians. The Soviet policy aimed at building the Azeri nation was treated there as an “imperialist intrigue” stirring up Azeri irredentism in order to annex part of the Iranian territory (Niessman 1987: 12; Swietochowski 1995: 192; Croissant 1998: 61). Iranian scholars remarked that inhabitants of Atropatene, and some of northern Azerbaijan, spoke Iranian, and that Atropatene itself was always a part of Parthia and had never been independent. Some of them argued that the local inhabitants often assimilated the Turkic-speaking newcomers. They maintained that the Persians had ruled permanently over backward Turkic tribes. An extensive Turkification of Azerbaijan was associated with the Seljuqs of the 11th century (for that, see Fazily 1964; Motika 1991: 585; Astourian 1994: 57). There is no question that none of this would satisfy the Azeris, who could not but perceive the Iranian view as a clear manifestation of pan-Iranism (Fazily 1964, 1970, 1984; Aliev 1985).

In Iran, they had a term for large linguistic groups like the Azeris (*qoum*), but it had a special meaning closely linked with genetic origins (Tapper 1989: 237). That is why, in order to manifest themselves as a distinct group, the Azeris of Iran were in need of their own view of ethnogenesis, which the scholars of Soviet Azerbaijan were ready to provide.

Indeed, the belief in the early and continuous unity of the northern and southern Azerbaijanians, not only in political and territorial, but also in ethnic terms, became the basis on which all the main Azeri works of Azeri ethnogenesis were built up. As in many other Soviet republics, the end of the Stalin era witnessed major shifts in the historical profession in Azerbaijan. In 1954, a conference took place at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, where they condemned the distortions of history during Baghirov’s time (Altstadt 1992: 171). This was especially timely because the extensive study of Median history carried out by I. M. Diakonov on behalf of the Baku Institute of History (Ismailov 1954) revealed the dubiousness of the former idea of close relations between the Azeri ancestors and the Medes (Diakonov 1995: 731).

As a result, historians were given a new order to re-write the “History of Azerbaijan”. This three-volume book came out in Baku in 1958-1962. Its first volume dealt with all the earlier periods, up to the annexation of Azerbaijan by Russia, and the team of authors included all the major specialists at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR: Academician I. A. Guseinov, and also Z. I. Ibragimov, A. N. Guliev, Ye. A. Tokarzhevskii, M. Kh. Sharifly and M. M. Efendiev. There were no archaeologists among them, although the volume began with the Palaeolithic epoch. At the same time, the reader was informed that the volume was reviewed by all the major research centers of the Soviet Union where they studied the history of the Caucasus; and the best Soviet historians took part in the review.

What was the content of this volume; what were the authors fascinated with and what was omitted? Already in the first pages, the authors pointed out that Azerbaijan was one of the earliest centers of human civilization, that statehood

emerged there in the very early days, that the Azeri people had developed a high original culture and that for centuries they had struggled for freedom and independence against foreign invaders. Northern and southern Azerbaijanians were considered the same entity, and the joining of the former with Russia was called a progressive historical act (Guseinov 1958: VII). At the same time, the volume focused mainly on the history of northern Azerbaijan, i.e. the territory that was the basis of the Azerbaijan SSR.

Southern Azerbaijan was of interest only because early states had developed there in the early 1st Millennium B.C. These included Manna, established in the 9th century B.C. by the highland tribes of Lullubi and Guti, and Media, one of the most powerful states in the Middle East in the 7th – 6th centuries B.C. In the Hellenistic time, a new state emerged there – Media Atropatene, or just Atropatene, which was regarded by the authors as the restoration of the local state tradition. While pointing out that the name of contemporary Azerbaijan derived from the name of this state, the authors put all these early political entities into a continuous line and considered them successive stages of the development of Azeri statehood (Guseinov 1958: 44). All of this was needed to demonstrate the deep historical roots of the latter and to represent the Azeri people as the bearers of a very early political tradition.

Moreover, although they recognized that Atropatene was situated south of the Arax River, the authors “discovered” its strong gravitation toward the “northern Azeri territories”, to Albania, as if the former was related to the latter both ethnically and culturally. In order to prove this relatedness, the authors opposed the local language (called “Azeri”) to Persian (Guseinov 1958: 48-49). The reader also remained ignorant of the fact that both of these languages belonged to the Iranian group of languages and had nothing to do with the Nakh-Daghestani languages of Caucasian Albania. One might also doubt the idea of intensive direct contacts between Atropatene and Albania, because, as the textbook stated, the Albanian tribes lived north of the Kura River, and Atropatene was situated south of the Arax River. True, several pages later, the authors corrected this error and maintained that Albania lay “behind the Arax River” (Guseinov 1958: 28, 48, 50). All this reasoning helped them to argue that a new people was created in the territory of Atropatene that served as the basis for the development of the future Azeri people (Guseinov 1958: 49).

Caucasian Albania was another early state that attracted the authors’ attention. While avoiding discussion of the quite obscure issue of its location, the authors localized it within very wide limits from the Terek River in the north to the Lower Kura and Arax Rivers in the south. They depicted Caucasian Albania as a very rich region, where a state had emerged in the 1st century B.C. that was continuously developing until the very end of the 4th century, when Albania was for a century subjugated by Sussanian Iran. The authors included the right side of the Kura River (Utik, Artsakh and Paytakaran regions) in Albania without hesitation. They mentioned its subordination to the Armenian kingdom only in passing as though it was a less important episode. At the same time, they recognized that the population

of Artsakh (Karabagh) had already been Armenized by the beginning of the 1st Millennium A.D. (Guseinov 1958: 50-82).

The authors did not fail to note that the Albanian writing system was invented in the beginning of the 5th century, but they completely ignored the role of the Armenian enlightener, Mesrob Mashtots, in that event (Guseinov 1958: 101). Later on, some Azeri authors went so far as to reject his participation in the invention of the Albanian alphabet and, in order to prove that, referred to A. G. Perikhanian (for example, see Mamedova 1986: 7; Buniatov 1987c: 118). At the same time, Perikhanian put forward the hypothesis that Mesrob Mashtots made an Albanian named Benjamin his assistant, and taught him how one could create an alphabet. She demonstrated clearly that when the Albanian alphabet was developed it was very much affected by the Armenian model. Thus, she had no doubt that Mesrob Mashtots did take part in this project (Perikhanian 1966: 127-133). To put it differently, the authors of the textbook did their best to demonstrate the originality and independence of the Albanian state and to play down Armenian influence there.

How did the authors view the formation of the Azeri language? They recognized the major role of the Seljuq conquest of the 11th century, which had caused the mass migration of the Turkic-speaking nomads. At the same time, they viewed the Seljuqs as an alien force that caused new hardship and deprivations for the local population. That is why the authors emphasized the struggle of the local groups for freedom and appreciated the collapse of the Seljuq Empire, which made it possible to restore Azeri statehood once again. It is true, the textbook stated, that Seljuq rule started the widespread use of Turkic language that leveled the former language differences between the north and south Azerbaijanians. However, only language replacement took place; the population was still the same. In this way the Azeri people were provided with the status of an indigenous people, whose ancestors nonetheless spoke different languages. Hence, primordial connections with the lands of Caucasian Albania and Atropatene proved to be much more important factors than language affiliation, although the authors recognized that the emergence of linguistic unity led to the formation of the Azeri people (Guseinov 1958: 138-141, 171-172).

The book in question served as the model for a new school textbook that came out in 1960. All the chapters on history before the end of the 19th century were completed by the Academician A. S. Sumbatzade. The tendency to identify the early Azeri state tradition with the kingdoms of Manna and Media Atropatene was even more visible. Compared to them, the image of Media was less colorful. Once again, the independence of both Atropatene and Caucasian Albania was stressed. The latter was depicted as covering an extended territory from the Great Caucasus range in the north to the Arax River in the south, including the right bank of the Kura River. As in the academic publication, the role of Mesrob Mashtots was ignored, and the medieval chronicler, Moses of Kalankatui, who wrote in Armenian, was presented as an "Albanian chronicler". Earlier, the author mentioned pre-Seljuq Turkic migrations, but recognized that Turkic language has won the final victory

only in the 11th – 12th centuries. On the one hand, the role of Turkic language in the consolidation of the local population was also recognized, but, on the other hand, biological, cultural and historical continuity, rooted in the very remote local past, was emphasized. This seemed sufficient to the author, who did not go deeper into the issue of the formation of the Azeri people (Istoriia 1960). The paragraph on the “great Azeri poet” was supplemented by a portrait of Nizami Ganjevi, drawn by the artist, G. Khalykov, in the 1940s. Although an authentic portrait of the poet did not exist, in accordance with Muslim norms, the portrait in question met Baghirov’s requirements, and has ever since been reproduced in all Azeri textbooks²⁸). Similar ideas were accepted in another textbook, published in 1969 by the Department of History of Azerbaijan in Azerbaijan State University and intended for external and night school students (Kaziev et al. 1969).

Thus, as Audrey Altstadt put it, the “History of Azerbaijan” was an “uneven but useful history, which established the ‘new orthodoxy’ for contemporary and subsequent scholarly publications” (Altstadt 1992: 173). Until as recently as the early 1990s, this publication retained its importance as the main course in the history of Azerbaijan, and its general ideas were perceived as instructions and a call for action. Since that time, the “Median roots” of the Azeri have lost their luster. Instead, Manna was praised as the earliest state in the territory of Azerbaijan; Media Atropatene and Caucasian Albania were glorified, for they created the basis for the formation of an Azeri people; and the early medieval Turks were appreciated as the agency that endowed these people with the Turkic language.

CHAPTER 10

BETWEEN MEDIA, CAUCASIAN ALBANIA AND THE TURKIC WORLD: THIRST FOR A NEW VIEW

The intentional playing down of the role of Turkic language, characteristic for the “History of Azerbaijan”, was the result of Stalin’s struggle against pan-Turkism. Scholars still remembered how – quite recently – Baghirov called for an intensive struggle against pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism (Baghirov 1950: 71). A resolution carried by a united scholarly conference, held in Baku in 1954 and gathering specialists from all the Transcaucasian republics, still contained a paragraph aimed at the struggle against pan-Turkism, pan-Iranism and pan-Islamism (Reshenie 1957: 857). However, with the growth of liberalism from the end of the 1950s, this factor was losing its former importance, and Turkic-speaking scholars began to be more attracted to their mother tongue. In the 1950s – 1960s, one of the most active in this field was Z. I. Yampol’sky, a researcher affiliated with the Institute of History and Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. He took part in the completion of many textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan, including those already mentioned. His views were first very sensitive to the changing ethno-political environment, and second made a significant contribution to the formation of the revisionist stream among Azeri historians in the 1970s – 1980s. That is why the evolution of his views is of major interest here²⁹).

It makes sense to distinguish between two periods in the evolution of Yampol’sky’s views, dividing them in the mid-1960s. During the first period, his main task seemed to be first, the confirmation of the early unity of the population of Azerbaijan, and second, the isolation of the local people from their neighbors, especially the Iranians and Armenians. In the second period, he placed more emphasis on the local roots of Turkic language in the region. Yampol’sky was not a linguist; however, old place and tribal names as well as some other linguistic issues were at the core of his constructions. Since he was not aware of the methodology used by specialists working with these materials, he relied on his own nationalist attitudes, and tried to resolve disputable issues from the viewpoint of Azeri patriotism. To take but one case, he interpreted the name Atropat as a common noun, and without any serious reasons assumed that it was linked to the Zoroastrian clergy. He also translated the name “Azerbaijan” as “place of the fire god”, and at the same time did his best to separate it from the Iranian language (Yampol’sky 1949b: 4, 1955a; Azerli, Musevi, Yampol’sky 1974)³⁰). True, that was not an original

idea of his; he was following Marr, who was the first to revise the traditional explanation of the term “Azerbaijan” (Cf. Marr 1926: 156; Istoriia 1939: 20)³¹).

Initially, Yampol’sky strictly followed the line designated by the Party bosses and developed the idea of the Median, Atropatenian, and Albanian ancestry of the Azeris. True, he recognized that all these early groups spoke different languages, and Turkic was out of question (Yampol’sky 1957: 129-130). Moreover, while following Marr in his attack on Indo-European studies, and relating them to imperialism and Eurocentrism, Yampol’sky was inclined to separate the Median language from the Iranian (Yampol’sky 1949a: 37). At the same time, he protested against the association of the Albanians with the Turkic-speaking population and identified them as the Yaphetides (Yampol’sky 1949a: 2). However, after Stalin’s death and Baghirov’s dismissal, when the political climate relaxed, Yampol’sky gradually began to revise this concept.

He agreed that in the early days there were two political bodies in the territory of the future Azerbaijan – Media Atropatene in the south and Albania in the north. However, while analyzing the locations of various tribes mentioned there by the classical authors, he maintained that the same tribal names were commonly listed in both the north and south. Having avoided discussing their language (or languages), he claimed that all of them might speak the same language, which he called “proto-Median” (Yampol’sky 1954). He emphatically objected to the classification of this language within the Iranian group. He also insisted that in the remote past there was no question of Armenian being spoken in the territory of the future Azerbaijan. He knew that there was a distinct language with its own writing system in Caucasian Albania, but he omitted mentioning North Caucasian relations to this particular language (but see Yampol’sky 1956: 98); instead, he discovered the term “Azerbaijani language” in an Arab manuscript of the 10th century (Yampol’sky 1955b). He also discovered some ethnic group called the “Atropateans” among the Medes and constructed the “Atropatean, or Azerian (early Azeri) people” from that.

He was aware that linguists include Median in the Iranian group; still he did his best to look for similar roots in Azeri, and at the same time, tried to push the history of Turkic language in eastern Transcaucasia and the adjacent areas of Iran far back into the past. He referred to the well-known Soviet linguist, S. Ye. Malov, who in the early 1950s, following Marr’s ideas, argued that the Turks lived in eastern Europe from incredibly early times. Malov dated this to “much earlier than the 5th century B.C.” and maintained that even at that time the Turks occupied the same regions that they live in nowadays (Malov 1952). Following Malov, and also in accordance with the line of the textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan discussed above, Yampol’sky argued that the various groups of newcomers who infiltrated east Transcaucasia in the past were numerically small (he went so far as to make demographic calculations!) and were unable to affect the local population or their culture. True, he left open the issue of whether the indigenous inhabitants were Turkic-speakers from the very beginning or shifted to the language of the newcomers. Yet, he considered it important to dissociate himself publicly from pan-

Turkism and pan-Iranism (Yampol'sky 1956). That was not an easy task, for his ideas about some indigenous Turkic-speaking environment in the Middle East were quite similar to what was being said by contemporary Turkish scholars. In particular, some of the latter did their best to prove that the Urartians, Hittites and other local peoples were Turanians, i.e. Turks (for that, see Zulalian 1970: 14-15, 19-38).

Finally, the last piece in this early set of Yampol'sky's articles stated that over the last 2,500 years there had been no significant ethnic changes at all at the territory of southeast Transcaucasia and northern Iran. Invasions by the Scythians, Romans, Khazars, and Arabs had no effect on the bulk of the native inhabitants, who retained their language and cultural distinctions. For this time, Yampol'sky warned against careless treatment of ethnic names – the “name of a tribe and its real ethnic composition may not coincide in different historical periods and in different countries”. The conclusion was that, despite 3,000 years of drastic changes, the contemporary Azeris were the direct ethnic descendants of both the Media Atropatene and Albanian populations (Yampol'sky 1962). A few years later, Yampol'sky wrote the same of Caspiana, situated in the lowlands of Azerbaijan in the early past, and hinted that early “Caspians” might be the ancestors of the Azeri people (Yampol'sky 1971).

Since the mid-1960s, the Turkic theme had sounded louder and louder in Yampol'sky's works. Now, he discussed the incredibly distant past of the Turks in general, and in the southeast Transcaucasian and north Iranian regions in particular (Yampol'sky 1966). He recalled some ethnic names (“Turcae”, “Tyrcae”) mentioned by the classical authors, such as Pliny the Elder and Pomponius Mela, and remarked that their sounds were reminiscent of the Turkic world; he had referred to these names in some of his earlier articles, but without any comment (Yampol'sky 1954: 106)³²). It seems it was sufficient for him to maintain that Turks were already living in eastern Transcaucasia at the beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. Although he himself warned against the uncritical treatment of early tribal names, in this particular instance he referred to very obscure evidence from Pliny the Elder and Pomponius Mela, in order to state that they did know about the Turks in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea (Yampol'sky 1966, 1970a). Moreover, basing his conclusions on even more doubtful interpretation of tribal names, he ascribed this knowledge to Herodotus (Yampol'sky 1970b). It is worth noting that the similarities he discussed could be explained even more easily by an error made by a medieval copyist (replacing the Greek “J” with the Latin “T” in the term “Jyrkai”). In the meantime, Yampol'sky went even further and constructed a powerful religious center in southern Azerbaijan, headed by some Atropatae, and hinted broadly that their language had nothing to do with Iranian and, instead, was quite close to Azeri (Azerli, Musevi, Yampol'sky 1974).

Instructively, Yampol'sky's views not only found benevolent acceptance in Azerbaijan but were even represented in the all-Soviet reference book, the Soviet Historical Encyclopedia. In his entry there, Yampol'sky identified early Albanian

tribes with the bearers of an archaeological culture of so-called jug graves. He also depicted the dramatic history of their state and culture, and represented the Albanians as the ancestors not only of the Azeri people, but also of the Nagorny Karabagh Armenians, some of the Daghestanis and some of the Georgians of Kakheti. It is also instructive to note what he omitted. He avoided discussing the dates of the emergence of the Albanian Kingdom and the beginning of the Turkification of its population. It is obvious that he expected these dates to be much earlier than scholars commonly believed they were. Indeed, some contemporary Azeri scholars did their best to push the dates far back into the past. Yampol'sky described the flourishing of literature and schooling in Albania after the original alphabet had been introduced; but he totally ignored the name of Mesrob Mashtots. This had become common among Azeri scholars, as we have already seen. Finally, his entry was supplemented by a map, which included the right bank of the Kura River (Utik, Artsakh) in the Caucasian Albania of the 2nd century B.C. (Yampol'sky 1961), although there was no Albanian state in those days.

It is easy to notice that Yampol'sky's concept was very close to the ideas of the Azeri émigré Mirza Bala, a former member of the United Party of "Musavat" and one of the "Turkic Federalists". This activist had published a pamphlet in Ankara in 1951 in which he called the Arsacid Dynasty that ruled in early Albania and Armenia descendants of the Central Asian Sakae. He associated the latter with the Hunns and provided them with the Turkic language. This is how the early population of the region between the Kura and Arax Rivers became Turkic, as though they were the true builders of the early states in southern and southeastern Transcaucasia. Mirza Bala did his best to demonstrate continuity between Media, Atropatene, Albania and modern Azerbaijan. He included Utik, Artsakh, Sisakene and other lands on the right bank of the Kura River in Albania. In his view, these lands had nothing to do with the Armenians (Bala 1989. For that, see also Astourian 1994: 65-66).

In the meantime, the absolute numbers of Turkic people in the USSR was growing; by 1960 there were 25 million, and they were the second most numerous group, after the Slavic peoples. Turkic intellectuals had grown in numbers, and there was a school of professional historians among the Azeris once again. In 1945, there were only 18 researchers on the staff of the Institute of History, and by 1958, their number had increased to 69. By 1965 there were 109 staff members. In 1945, there were only three Candidates in History among them (including I. A. Guseinov, then the director of the Institute). In 1958 there was one Doctor of History and six Candidates in History, and by 1965 there were eight Doctors, and there were 54 Candidates (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1965: 5). Moreover, in 1958 the former Department of the History of the Foreign Orient had broken away from the Institute and was granted status as a separate Institute of Oriental Studies in the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR (Buniatov 1982: 54). This was already a strong team of specialists, who were able to develop and advocate their own views on the history of the Azeri people. True, historical training was still less than perfect.

Initially, people were hired quite casually, whose only advantage was their party membership and social origin (Diakonov 1995: 731).

At the same time, all of this provided the Turkic elite with new reasons and chances to manifest their cultural and social demands. In the scholarly sphere, this was expressed through demands for more intensive development of Turkic studies. This strategy was only somewhat successful, and the new all-Union magazine, "Soviet Turkology", was issued in Baku starting in 1970. In its very first issue the editor-in-chief, the well-known Azeri philologist, Academician M. Sh. Shiraliev, claimed that the Turkic homeland was situated in western Asia rather than in Central Asia as was commonly believed, and that very early the Turks had spread across the vast region between the Ural River and western Europe. True, in order to secure himself from accusations of pan-Turkism, he called for separate studies on the cultural distinctions among various Turkic ethnic groups (Shiraliev, Asadullaev 1970). This signal was interpreted quite correctly. A new cycle of discussions of the origins and homeland of the Azeri people commenced. More and more Azeri scholars depicted their own remote ancestors as the earliest Turks in the world, who retained their original lands; indeed, the Turks were unhesitatingly called indigenous inhabitants.

Since the 1960s, more Azeri scholars argued that the Turkification of eastern Transcaucasia was associated with the Hunns and somewhat later by the influence of the Turkic khanate. Assumptions about early Turkic waves stirred up the imagination of local researchers (for example, see Guseinov 1962).

Thus, in the 1950s – 1960s, new discoveries in early and medieval history were observed in Azerbaijan that had a lot to do with the strengthening of the Azeri identity under the rapid growth of the Azeri population, the development of urbanization and resistance to Russification. Not only historians but also writers were encouraged by all these processes. Whereas the historians attracted the writers' attention with new topics and new historical heroes, the writers were able to represent them in a way that was still unsafe for historians because of more severe censorship control. The early history of the Turks was an especially ripe field with far-reaching promises. While looking back to the early Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions and the legacy of the early Turkic states, the Turkic writers argued that their ancestors were the founders of very early civilizations and bearers of a very old tradition of writing. All of this was of crucial importance to securing and maintaining ethnic identity under the intensive modernization that had started in the 1960s and endangered the Turkic ethnic groups with heavy cultural and language losses (Altstadt 1991: 73-76, 1992: 174).

Meanwhile, in the 1960s – 1970s Azeri scholars split into three factions. In respect to the general approach toward Azeri ethnogenesis all of them shared the autochthonist concept. Some of them, a small but very influential group of "conservatives", still identified the Azeri ancestors with the pre-Turkic population of Azerbaijan (the "Albanian concept") and insisted that intensive Turkification took place only in the 11th – 12th centuries. Others, the "moderate revisionists",

agreed only with the first part of this approach and did their best to move the process of Turkification to a much earlier date. Still others, “the radical revisionists”, argued that the Azeri ancestors were Turkic-speakers from the very beginning. In this respect, they restored the Academician Marr’s view, which located the Turkic homeland in the Mediterranean region and the Near East. It is obvious that all three factions were eager to turn the Azeri people into a true indigenous population and to oppose them to the Iranian invaders. At the same time, since being related to the Turkic world stopped being a criminal characteristic, the revisionists made great efforts to emphasize those ties, albeit without any move toward turning down the autochthonist approach.

The well-known Azeri historians of earlier periods, the Academician Ziya M. Buniatov and the expert in dead languages, Igrar G. Aliev, were the leaders of the “conservatives”. Igrar G. Aliev (born in 1924) has succeeded in graduating from the Historical Faculty of Azerbaijan State University in 1945; in 1949 he defended his candidate thesis on the history of Media and by the end of the 1940s had already been appointed the Chairman of the Department of Early History at the Baku Institute of History, where he held this position for 40 years. After a four-year scholarship at the Leningrad Division of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, where he was supervised by the Academician V. V. Struve and some other prominent Soviet Assyriologists, in 1960 Aliev defended his doctoral thesis, based on his monograph, “History of Media”, at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. From 1978 on, Aliev was the Director of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR; in 1981-1984 he acted as the Academician-Secretary of the Division of History, Economy, Philosophy and Law at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, headed the Toponymic Commission at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR, was a member of the State Committee for awards in the field of science and technology, and, finally, was a member of the Nizami Commission. Simultaneously, he taught at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institute. In 1979, he was awarded the honorary title of Distinguished Scholar of Azerbaijan, and in 1980 was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. Aliev was one of the chief authors of the one-volume textbook “History of Azerbaijan”, published in 1979 and republished as a revised edition in 1994 (Abbasov 1999).

Aliev focused on the history of early Media and on Iranian history; he was one of those who developed the concept of the crucial role of the Medes in Azeri ethnogenesis (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 39-40; Astourian 1994: 55). His seminal monograph on the history of Media was completed by 1956 and was a response to the call of the Azerbaijan authorities to provide arguments in favor of the autochthonous formation of the Azeri people. Although there were only a few historical documents on Median history, he accomplished this task quite successfully. His views were based on the idea of an unbroken continuity in population and culture in the territory of Azerbaijan from the earliest times. True, Aliev recognized the role of migrations and language shifts, but, in his view, the

local inhabitants always made up the dominant majority and represented the driving force of the historical process – the “autochthonous in language population was in some areas the dominant one in cultural terms until the late classical period” (Aliev 1960: 17). He put special emphasis on the highland part of Media – called Atropatene – where he located the center of the historical continuity. There, the “Azerian Iranian-speaking people” had taken shape by the first centuries A.D., biologically linked with the local tribes (Aliev 1960: 39-40, 111). At the same time, he stressed the early ethno-cultural unity of the northwestern parts of Iran with the southwestern part of the Caspian region where related tribes lived from the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. to the beginning of the 1st Millennium A.D., who were classified within the “Caucasian-Hurrian” group in terms of language. They were the truly indigenous inhabitants of the Lake Urmia region, in the view of Aliev (Aliev 1960: 65-67, 71).

Adjacent to them he constructed an “Elamic-Caspian” ethnic conglomerate, occupying all the western regions of Iran from the 3rd Millennium B.C. until the early 1st Millennium A.D., i.e. before Iranization took place. Moreover, he insisted that even after the arrival of the Iranian-speaking tribes, the great bulk of the Median population was still made up of indigenous inhabitants speaking their former pre-Iranian languages (Aliev 1960: 84, 90-91, 99-107). In brief, he believed that a homogeneous population survived there across thousands years, and, despite late language replacements, it secured its distinct cultural features and made up a substantial part of the Azeri people (Aliev 1960: 90-91, 112-113). The cultural argument played a crucial role in his construction: indeed, Aliev assumed that, since the Iranian newcomers were nomads, they lacked sufficient skills to construct the outstanding pieces of Median architecture. The latter was possible only for local craftsmen with a sedentary life-style (Aliev 1960: 206). It was these ideas that were appreciated by the Azeri proponents of the autochthonous approach.

It is worth noting that on Aliev’s lips the term “early Azeri (drevneazerbajjansky)” referred only to a territory and lacked any linguistic associations. It turned out that the Atropatenians, who spoke “early Azeri”, in fact, spoke a language of Iranian stock, and that in the Middle Ages “early Azeri (drevneazerbajjanskaia)” speech was still articulated in Azeri that was of Iranian origin. At the same time, Aliev did his best to isolate it from Iranian proper and to relate it to Talysh (Aliev 1960: 11; Aliev 1989c: 27-28).

One more important point in Aliev’s perspective was the early polities in Azerbaijan territory that were needed to provide Azeri statehood with very long historical roots. Aliev called the Manna Kingdom of the 8th century B.C. the first large state in the territory of northwestern Iran, that preceded the Media of the 7th – 6th centuries B.C. (Aliev 1960: 176-184). In comparison with the concept prevalent at the turn of the 1950s, Aliev made some corrections and did not insist that the Azeris originated from the Medes (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 59-60).

In Aliev’s view, the crucial role in the formation of the future Azeris was played partly by the “Median-Atropatenian people” who were the native inhabitants

and partly by Iranian newcomers in the 1st Millennium B.C. to the territory of Media Atropatene (Aliev 1960: 113). This issue was so much important for him that in the 1980s he carried out a special study of Media Atropatene's history. He represented it as an independent state flourishing in northwestern Iran from the end of the 4th century B.C. and throughout the Hellenistic period. In the course of time, an ethnic merger of the descendants of the numerous earlier tribes (Guti, Lullubi, Hurrites, Mannei, and others) with the Medes occurred. In Aliev's view, this process was of extraordinary importance: first, the name of Atarpatakan appeared that was the basis for the term Azerbaijan; second, the Iranian-speaking Atropatakaneans were among the direct ancestors of the contemporary Azeris, who had lost Iranian and shifted to Turkic during the medieval period (Aliev 1989c: 3-4). Paraphrasing the first Russian chronicle, Aliev wrote: "from Atarpatakan... the land of Azerbaijan originated" (Aliev 1989c: 32). Instructively, at this time Aliev had already based his arguments on the Soviet theory of ethnos and recognized that a language was one of the most important markers of ethnos, and that its replacement caused the loss of a former ethnic identity (Aliev 1989c: 24). He was not embarrassed though, and kept insisting on ethnic continuity beginning with the earliest local inhabitants. Yet he remarked that the Median ethnic element occupied the leading position in the Kingdom of Atropatene and that it literally swallowed up the entire preceding local population. To put it another way, a completely new ethnic entity emerged in Atropatene, which, nonetheless, inherited a lot from the indigenous population (Aliev 1988c, 1989c: 30-31, 41-42). In fact, Aliev came back to the "Median" concept of the formation of the Azeri people. Indeed, he assumed that the "Atropatenian ethnos" was directly descended from the Medes, who introduced it to the Indo-European world.

In brief, Aliev believed that the Azeri people emerged in the territory of Azerbaijan in the course of the long and complex process of the development of local tribes from Atropatene and Caucasian Albania – the Mannei, Caspians, Medes, and Albanians, who spoke different languages, in particular, North Caucasian (the Albanians) and Iranian (the Medes). Only in the Middle Ages, after they integrated several waves of steppe nomads, did they shift to Turkic. Aliev placed special emphasis on the fact that this concept was consciously aimed at "bourgeois ideas of pan-Turkism" (Aliev 1988a: 59-62). That is why he was especially irritated with less-professional revisionist concepts, and, as we shall see further on, he invested a lot of energy in struggling against them.

Another well-known Azeri historian, the Academician Ziya M. Buniatov (1921-1997), was an even more consistent proponent of the "Albanian concept". He began to study the origins of the Azeri people at that time when the Median concept was already in decline. That is why, while being an adherent of the autochthonist approach, Buniatov associated the direct Azeri ancestors with the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania. These views of his affected the Azeri historical profession for decades. Buniatov himself was an expert on the early medieval period and did a lot to prove that the Azeri people had Albanian roots. He was born in the provincial

Azerbaijan town of Astara and hardly dreamed of pursuing the profession of historian. After graduation from high school, he was trained at the Baku infantry school (1939-1941), and proved a brave officer during World War II. For his deeds, he was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union, with numerous orders and medals. In 1945-1946, he served as assistant to the military commandant in one of the areas in Soviet-occupied Berlin. Being transferred to the reserves, he studied at the prestigious Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1946-1950. After graduation, he was a post-graduate student there under the tutelage of the well-known Soviet specialist in Arabic studies, Ye. A. Beliaev. In 1954, he defended his candidate's thesis, which dealt with Italian imperialism in Africa. After coming back to Baku, for ten years (1954-1964) he was affiliated with the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. Then, in 1964, he moved to the newly established Institute of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. There he was the chairman of the department, and since 1981 almost without a break he was the director of the Institute. At the beginning of perestroika, it seemed that his time as director was over, but in 1988, he was elected director by the staff of the Institute. After 1970, Buniatov was the editor-in-chief of the chief journal in humanities in Azerbaijan – "Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, a series in history, philosophy and law". His made a fast-moving career. In 1967, he became a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR; in 1976, he became an Academician; in 1980, he was awarded the State Prize of Azerbaijan for his book, "The State of Atabeqs in Azerbaijan"; and in 1982, he was awarded the honorary title of distinguished scholar of Azerbaijan. Thus, Buniatov was able to seriously affect the development of the humanities in Azerbaijan, and the Azerbaijan authorities had to reckon with him (Kargamanov 1981; Zulalova 1988: 7-36).

When Azerbaijan had a chance to demonstrate its scholarly achievements and to show off its outstanding contemporaries, this honor was more often than not vested on Academician Buniatov. For example, this occurred in 1982, when the newspaper "Pravda" organized a public showing of the intellectual resources of various republics on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the USSR. The Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences found it reasonable to provide "Pravda" with a picture of Buniatov, accompanied by all his high titles (Abdullaev 1982). True, his glory came primarily of his military feats – there was no other Academician in the USSR who was a Hero of the Soviet Union (Zubkov 1985a, 1985b).

The Institute of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East focused mainly on the study of Turkey and Iran, and was very politically important. Yet, since the very late 1950s, Buniatov's interests were shifting to the medieval history of Azerbaijan, and only ten years after his defense of his candidate thesis, he defended a doctoral thesis that dealt with "Azerbaijan in the 7th – 9th centuries", marking an important step in the development of the profession of history in Azerbaijan (Zulalova 1988: 7-36).

It is worth noting that Buniiatov's career developed not without problems. Sometimes he was attacked for his inordinate sympathy with the Turkic theme. Thus, in 1971 together with some other Azeri historians (M. Ismailov, S. Alijarov) he was accused by the First Secretary of the CPA, Heydar Aliev, of deviation from the Party line, romanticization of the past and concessions to "bourgeois falsifiers" (Aliev 1971: 3). Thoughtful people knew that the pan-Turkic concepts were the target, although they were not named openly. In those days all of these charges constituted a grave warning and could have had far-reaching consequences for those accused. It is also true that Aliev's attack was probably a routine speech made to please his Moscow bosses. Instructively, he avoided mentioning "bourgeois nationalism" in his long speech. The historians he accused not only retained all their positions, but also kept developing concepts that were hardly compatible with Soviet internationalism. One cannot help assuming that they had the moral support of the Azerbaijani authorities.

Years passed before close relationships between Buniiatov and Aliev received strong confirmation. Since 1993 Heydar Aliev came to power in an independent Azerbaijan, and Buniiatov became one of the founders of the "New Azerbaijan" pro-presidential political party, a member of its leadership and a deputy in the new parliament of Azerbaijan. He was assassinated in February 1997 in obscure circumstances (Useinov 1997).

In 1965, Buniiatov published a monograph entitled "Azerbaijan in the 7th – 9th centuries", which became an important reference book for many Azeri scholars who studied the early medieval period and the formation of the Azeri people. One editor of the book was Yampol'sky, whose ideas were very influential on contemporary Azeri scholarship especially as concerned Azeri ethnogenesis. For example, his ideas were echoed in the book by Aliev analyzed above. However, Buniiatov was actually the first Azeri researcher to focus directly on ethnogenetic issues rather than on socio-political history. He extended the term "Azerbaijan" to early Caucasian Albania and other medieval states developed in northern Azerbaijan. Another remarkable feature of his book was that it clearly demonstrated the Azeri disposition to identify themselves most of all according to their place of birth rather than in reference to their language or culture. This approach manifested itself in Buniiatov's attitude towards the medieval local cultural activists who, he argued, associated themselves mainly with their native areas (Buniiatov 1965a: 9, 11).

Buniiatov's book strongly advocated an idea, tempting to the Azeri authors, that the "indigenous Turks" lived in Azerbaijan, long before the Seljuqs arrived. Buniiatov associated those early Turks with the waves of Hunns, Sabirs and Khazars, and maintained that Turkification had already commenced in the 4th – 5th centuries (Buniiatov 1965a: 179-182).

Buniiatov had no doubt that the Islamized and Turkified Albanians were Azeri ancestors. In his view, the Karabagh Armenians were also the descendants of those Albanians, but in this case Armenized and converted to monophysiticism. Moreover, he did his best to prove that the Albanians adopted Christianity much

earlier than the Armenians did (Buniatov 1965a: 97-100). To put it another way, as the American historian Robert H. Hewsen remarked, this concept actually derived both the Azeris and the Karabagh Armenians from the same ancestors, which was in perfect accordance with the Soviet adjustment of the rapprochement and merger of various ethnic groups, and in fact approved the assimilation of the Armenian minority by the Azeris. Hewsen also noticed the potential for Azeri claims to lands of the Armenian SSR (Hewsen 1982: 28).

Being guided by a patriotic approach, Buniatov reproduced the Azeri argument, already common at those days, that a leader of a religious-mystical movement in the 9th century, Babek, a native of northwestern Iran, was a hero of the Azeri people (cf. Buniatov 1965a: 236-269, and Guseinov 1958: 118-124). Having claimed that, Buniatov failed to mention that Babek spoke Persian, and ignored the witnesses of contemporaries who called him the "Persian" (Buniatov 1965a: 334, 337)³³).

Yet, the wide spread of Persian in medieval Azeri polities and states did not hold back Buniatov. Indeed, as we already know, Azeri was by no means viewed an important identity factor by Azeri authors. Buniatov made it clear that the Seljuq sultans were illiterate, they relied on Persian assistants, and that was why all documents and business letters were completed in Persian. Moreover, he even recognized that Persian was the mother tongue of the Shirvan elite, and it was in this language that marvelous verses were composed at the Shirvan-Shah court. Yet, he used to speak of the "Persian speakers", rather than the Persian poets, and constructed a "Shirvan group in the Azeri poetic school" for them. He considered Nizami Ganjevi the greatest of them (Buniatov 1978: 225-230, 1991: 26-30). He listed Mkhitar Gosh, Vanakan and Kirakos Gandzaketsi among his contemporaries, without mentioning that they wrote in Armenian and identified themselves with the Armenians. There was no problem for Buniatov here, and he called them Azeris without reserve. Yet, it is well known that, for example, Mkhitar Gosh dreamed of the restoration of a united Armenian state (for that, see Safarian 1989).

In the meantime, in the 1970s – 1980s, Aliiev's and Buniatov's concepts looked obsolete to young Azeri scholars, and intellectual thought was undergoing a crisis. The revisionist approach seemed more tempting, it had the allure of a fresh view and especially of the ability to feed the nationalist idea. That is why, although the fundamental volumes on the history of Azerbaijan which came out in the 1970s – 1980s followed Aliiev's views, he was losing supporters over the course of time. One of his few supporters was A. S. Sumbatzade. In his works, Azerbaijan was becoming an everlasting body. It was naturally developing from a long, continuous evolutionary process that had started in the Palaeolithic (an Early Palaeolithic cave of Azykh, the earliest human site in the USSR, discovered in 1965, was referred to). The author pointed out proudly that Azerbaijan was one of the west Asian regions where a settled life had commenced, farming was invented, and the first cities emerged. He wrote of the "statehood of Azerbaijan" as if it had been known since the beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. To put it other way, a country with the

name of “Azerbaijan” and its territory made up the core of his concept. According to Sumbatzade, Manna, flourishing in northwestern Iran in the 9th – 7th centuries B.C., was one of the first Azeri states. He populated it with Guti and Lullubi, who spoke some languages of North Caucasian stock or, probably, even Elamic. He did emphasize that they had no relations with neighboring Iranian-speaking Media, and even after they had been subjugated by the latter, Iranization did not occur there. They were still not Iranized by the Parthian period. Only the Sussanians introduced a substantial Iranian element there. Yet, following Aliev, Sumbatzade pointed that, although the “Azeri” language was of Iranian stock, it was quite different from the Persian (Sumbatzade 1979, 1990: 33-35, 47-49). We shall see further on that this intentional dissociation of the Persian world was closely connected with the current political situation.

At the same time, Sumbatzade attached more importance to the Albanians and argued that the “history of Caucasian Albania is the history of Soviet Azerbaijan”. Daghestan was excluded from the latter (Sumbatzade 1990: 54-56) which made a problem for the Daghestani historians who were also inclined to derive their ancestors from Caucasian Albania. He did not recognize the Armenization of the Albanian population from the right bank of the Kura River, either, and referred to the Udins, who had maintained their original Albanian language until very recently (Sumbatzade 1990: 54-56). The author did not seem to notice that this argument might be used against the Turkification of the Albanians with no less success.

At the same time, Sumbatzade came out against the revisionist tendency to push Turkic history in the Caspian Sea region far back into the past, and defended the orthodox view that the Turks had arrived from the Asian hinterlands. Yet, he agreed that over the course of the 1st Millennium A.D. the Caspian region was frequently invaded by waves of Turkic nomads and maintained that, as a result, Azerbaijan was a Turkic country from the remote past (Sumbatzade 1990: 78-91).

Sumbatzade made sharp distinctions among ethnicity, culture and language. He argued that “in respect to ethnic affiliation the Azeris are related to the earliest inhabitants of the country – the Mannei, Atropatenians and Albanians, but in their language they are certainly a Turkic-speaking people” (Sumbatzade 1990: 5). He claimed further on that the “Azeri people had formed in the course of mixing: a merger between, on the one hand, the indigenous population of the country originating from the Guti-Lullubi tribes, the Mannei, Atropatenians and Albanians, and, on the other hand, migrants, most of all the Turkic-speaking tribes whose language had won the final victory” (Sumbatzade 1990: 10). He recognized that some Turkic groups had infiltrated the Caspian lowland corridor beginning with the Hunn invasion (2nd century A.D.), but was stuck to the idea that Turkic language became widespread only after the 11th -13th centuries A.D. Yet, even after that date, Turkic was popular only among commoners, and the literary tradition was represented initially by Arabic, then by Persian (Sumbatzade 1990: 130-131, 149).

Moreover, in his view, the Azeri ancestors had to change their language a few times: it occurred in southern Azerbaijan twice (first they shifted to Iranian “Azeri”

and then to “Turki”), and in northern Azerbaijan – once (they shifted from Albanian to Turkic) (Sumbatzade 1990: 17). Thus, Sumbatzade’s approach clearly adhered to the main goal of the “conservative” view – to secure the territory of all Azerbaijan for the Azeris through their identification with the earliest inhabitants. The Iranians who carried out the Iranization of southern Azerbaijan were presented as the main enemies.

That is why it seemed very important for the Azeris to isolate themselves from their Iranian heritage. They were already less fascinated with Media. The Manna inhabitants seemed to be much more promising ancestors. First, the state of Manna emerged earlier than Media did and was able to compete with other contemporary states of the Middle East. Second, its founders were linguistically related to the indigenous Caucasian people, including Caucasian Albania. Third, it played an important role in the consolidation of previously separate local tribes. Fourth, it happened that the Iranian-speaking nomads who had arrived from the north did not affect its population in any significant way. All these arguments were discussed in a book by S. M. Kashkai that focused on the Manna kingdom (Kashkai 1977). Thus, the autochthonous concept of the Azeri people’s formation was given an important new link. The adherents of this concept obtained an additional argument for their claims, that the “language and the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan did not change much” for thousands of years (Gukasian 1981: 124).

Yet, this concept had its own faults. For example, it was unclear how one could relate Manna to Atropatene and Caucasian Albania if there was a big chronological gap between them. The Chairman of the Department of Architectural Constructions at the Azerbaijan Engineer-Constructing Institute, D. A. Akhundov, attempted to resolve this problem. He not only emphasized the Albanian roots of the Azeris, but also tried to push them back to the past, constructing a pre-Albanian state of Caspiana. He identified its population with the Caspians as if they occupied all the Caucasus in the very early days, and then merged with the Albanians and were incorporated into Caucasian Albania. Moreover, he also constructed some “Albanian-Aryan” people who have actually never existed, and depicted a pattern of unbroken cultural continuity from the Neolithic up to the Middle Ages. While referring to quite questionable sources and his own equivocal assumptions, Akhundov presented Azerbaijan as a wealthy country with cities already by the beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. and ascribed the monumental fortifications erected by the Sussanians to the creative activity of the local inhabitants³⁴). His fantasy went so far as to remove the capital of Caucasian Albania to the place where contemporary Baku is situated, and to identify the Apsheron peninsula with Aryana Vedj, the legendary country of the Avesta Aryans (Akhundov 1986: 6, 60-64, 122, 130). Should one wonder after that that he constructed an early urban civilization in Nakhjivan at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium B.C. (Akhundov 1986: 181-202)? In brief, he did his best to first, represent the Albanians as the direct ancestors of the contemporary Azeris, and second, to draw an unbroken continuity between the Albanians and the earliest local cultures, then to represent the Albanians as the

founders of one of the first civilizations on Earth.

CHAPTER 11

REVISIONISTS: THE PAN-TURKIC ASSAULT

As we can already see, the “conservatives” were less interested in the problem of language replacement, because for them cultural and biological features were the main characteristics of a people. If these features demonstrated continuity, language shift seemed to be of subsidiary importance and could not affect the nature of the people.

The language issue played a much more important role for the “revisionists”. For them, loyalty to the Turkic language meant the strengthening of the relationships with the Turkic world and, most of all, with Turkey, where they were searching for support in case of emergency. That is why they did their best to push Turkic as deep as possible into the Azerbaijan past. The “revisionist school” began to take shape in Azerbaijan by the turn of the 1960s (Geibullaev 1991: 50). As one of its leaders, the historian S. S. Alijarov, explained later on, the school emerged in response to attempts to downplay the role of the Turkic legacy and to impose Iranian ancestors, represented by the Medes, on the Azeris (for that, see Sumbatzade 1987: 102, 133; Astourian 1994: 54). Indeed, under Stalin, when pan-Turkism and Islam were presented as the bitter enemies of the Soviet Union, Turkic and Muslim studies were by no means inspired and were treated as unsafe. It is no accident that for decades, Azeri archeology focused on the prehistoric and early medieval past; the study of Turkic and Muslim monuments was avoided. By inertia, this tendency was still there even in the 1950s – 1960s, after the political climate had relaxed. All of this led to dissatisfaction and irritation among those Azeris who were willing to be proud of their glorious Turkic ancestors and identified themselves with the Muslim culture.

All of this contributed to the development of revisionism within Azeri scholarship. The “revisionists” made every effort to reduce the role of the Seljuq conquest to a less-important event and, at the same time, to push the appearance of the Turkic ethnic groups in southeast Transcaucasia deep into the past or even to represent them as true indigenous inhabitants. As we already know, this sort of publication came out even in the 1960s. Sometimes they found space even in the prestigious journals of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR (for example, see Yusifov 1961: 26, note 12; Rzaev 1965; Gukasian 1968b: 118-121; Azerli 1974). It is worth noting that the most radical pan-Turkic views were published only in Azeri. To give only one example, in his article, R. Gurban extensively

referred to the pan-Turkic historical heritage and the glory of the early Turks. Being fascinated with some highly questionable etymologies, he tried to prove that the term "Azerbaijan" was coined in a genuinely Turkic environment (Gurban 1968).

In the 1980s, these ideas were not only picked up by science-fiction writers, but also began to infiltrate university textbooks and the academic productions of Azeri scholars. In particular, they were appreciated by the editorial board of the magazine, "Elm ve həyat" (Science and Life) published by the Association "Znanie" (Knowledge) of the Azerbaijan SSR. Sometimes these views were disseminated by the magazine, "Azerbaijan", the organ of the Union of Writers of the Azerbaijan SSR, and by some Baku newspapers. They were even published by the academic "Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR" which was evidence that powerful forces supported the "revisionists".

Even highly emotional, albeit belated, interventions made by such influential figures as the Academician Ziya M. Buniatov, and professor Igrar G. Aliev (Buniatov 1986b; 1987a; 1988; Buniatov, Neimatova 1985; Aliev 1986a; 1988a: 59-68; 1989a; 1990b) were unable to effectively combat "revisionists". Yet, the attitudes of these scholars towards "revisionism" were hardly consistent. Indeed, as we already know, the former ran the "Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR", and the latter let the revisionists organize regular meetings in his office. Moreover, in his book, "History of Media" Aliev explored some very dubious linguistic reconstructions and, as it was put by his reviewers, demonstrated poor knowledge of the methodology of contemporary historical linguistics (Melikishvili et al. 1962). In the 1960s, Buniatov was among those who started the search for the early Turks in the territory of Azerbaijan, but in 1986 he turned round and emphatically argued against the idea of the Turks in early Azerbaijan and against Turkification during the pre-Seljuq period (Buniatov 1987a: 125-126). Moreover, he now not only confirmed that the first mass Turkic (Seljuq) resettlement in the territory of Azerbaijan took place in the 11th century, but insisted that almost the entire population of Shirvan, from Derbent to the Lower Kura River, spoke Iranian even in the early 13th century. He concluded that the process of the Turkification of Shirvan had lasted until the establishment of Soviet power (Buniatov 1986c; 1990b).

The reason for the coordinated intervention of both these influential Azeri historians against the revisionists was quite simple. It was preceded by a signal from Moscow, when the Academician-secretary of the Division of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Sergei L. Tikhvinsky, spoke out harshly against the struggle between the national historical schools for a "cultural heritage" (Tikhvinsky 1986: 10-11). In particular, he was taking aim at pushing early Turkic history into the unwarrantably remote past. Naturally, as an official figure, Tikhvinsky spoke not in his own name but also on behalf of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and local scholars were accustomed to reckoning with that. Moreover, in the mid-1980s, national and ethnic problems drew the attention of the XXVII Congress of the CPSU, which took alarm concerning the growth of ethnocentrism

and the romanticizing of the past; at that time they once again began to talk of nationalism and chauvinism (Novosel'tsev 1985; Bromley 1986: 84-85).

As we already know, Buniatov himself put a powerful spur to the search for earlier traces of Turks in the territory of Azerbaijan. Even well trained Azeri researchers followed him, carrying on the task (Sumbatzade 1987: 134). For example, an expert in the early medieval history of Azerbaijan, S. B. Ashurbeily, wrote not only of the early waves of Turkic nomads which flooded Azerbaijan in the early medieval period, but even of some earlier Turks, as though they had lived there before the Hunn arrival. She also spoke of intensive Turkification in the 6th – 8th centuries as though Turkic had become widespread among the Albanians (Ashurbeily 1967: 62-65, 1983: 21-24, 61-67, 1988: 231-232). In his turn, the historian of the arts, N. I. Rzaev, also described the arrival of the Oghuz Turks in Azerbaijan and their active participation in the local cultural process, beginning from at least the first centuries A.D. (Rzaev 1976: 183, 194). Similar views were developed by the philologist, M. Seidov, who attempted to connect the early Turks with the composition of the Iranian Avesta and even of Sumerian epics (Seidov 1983). There is no question that the evidence at hand was hardly sufficient for those far-reaching conclusions.

Nonetheless, the idea of early Turkification gradually began to infiltrate school textbooks. For example, a textbook on the history of Azerbaijan was published by Azerbaijan State University in 1969. There they argued that mass migrations of Turkic-speaking Hunns and Khazars into the territory of Azerbaijan had already occurred by the 5th – 7th centuries. An Arab author of the 7th century was referred to as if he called Azerbaijan a “Turkic country”. The textbook maintained that the process of consolidation of the Turkic-speaking Azeri people was successfully developed on the eve of the Arab conquest and that it was finally completed in the 11th – 12th centuries, when the Oghuz and Seljuqs arrived (Kaziev et al. 1969: 9-10, 17). At the same time, the authors did not explain how that could be consistent with the dominance of Arabic in the liturgy and Persian in clerical work and belles-lettres. Instead, they did indeed note that there was already a literature in Azeri in the 13th – 15th centuries, and that “dozens of poets of the brotherly Armenian people” took part in composing it (Kaziev et al. 1969: 18-19).

The “radical revisionists” went even further. One of the first Azeri revisionists, the philologist V. L. Gukasian, based his views on the assumption of mass Turkification of early medieval Albania, which became a commonplace in Azeri historical publications. Thus, he argued that a huge wave of Turkic newcomers was observed in Caucasian Albania in the 7th century. In his view, there were already numerous “Turkic-speaking groups” there by that time, who played a crucial role in that Turkic was adopted by the bulk of the population (he avoided discussing which particular Turkic dialect was in question, though). In order to prove that, he looked for Turkic loan words in early medieval Armenian and Georgian chronicles. He also maintained that there was a Turkic population in Georgian territory in the late 1st Millennium A.D. and that the Turks predominated in Kartli, i.e. in the heartland of

historical Georgia, in the 11th – 12th centuries. At that time Turkic affected Persian as well, he said (Gukasian 1978)³⁵). Some authors “revealed” evidence of Turkic being used in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the Christian era in medieval Arabic manuscripts (Azerli 1974) or quite incautiously interpreted archaeological materials (Rzaev 1965).

Not only were they searching for earlier roots of a Turkic-speaking milieu; the roots of the Azeri culture in general and its connections with well-known or famous historical facts were on the agenda. Thus, a fashionable book of the 1980s read that the Caspians of the classical authors were the earliest ancestors of the Azeris³⁶). It also said that they invented Zoroastrian rituals, that Baku was visited by the classical Romans, that a classical Greek city might have flourished in that area, and that in general Baku was a very old city that had possibly been built in the 1st Millennium B.C. (Veliev 1987).

A big role in the final formation of the “revisionist school” was played by a regular seminar on the ethnogenesis and formation of the Azeri people, which met at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR at the beginning of the 1980s. The papers presented at the seminar were published in the edited volume, “Towards the problem of the ethnogenesis of the Azeri people” (Baku, 1984), which served as a sort of revisionist manifesto (for that, see Nissman 1987: 10)³⁷).

What was in that volume? One of the initiators of the project was the historian, S. S. Alijarov, a specialist in the history of the oil industry in the Baku region in the end of the 19th century. In many respects, he followed Yampol’sky and Gukasian. He once again referred to some cuneiform evidence of the presence of Turks, to supposedly Turkic place names in the classical literature, to early Turks in the territories of Georgia, Armenia and even in Sumer. He was thirsty for evidence of early mass occupation of Transcaucasia by the Turks, in order to prove the formation of the Azeri people in the 7th – 9th centuries, i.e., before the Seljuq arrival (Alijarov 1984). It is worth mentioning that Alijarov was the author of the chapters on the history of Azerbaijan before the 19th century in the aforementioned textbook, published by the Department of History of Azerbaijan of Azerbaijan State University (Kaziev et al. 1969).

Whereas Alijarov recognized the early Turkification of the Albanians, another author, Kemal Aliev, basing himself on the dubious manipulation of place names, did his best to prove that some Albanian tribes, in particular, the Utians, were Turkic-speakers from the very beginning, and that they represented the first wave of Turkic newcomers in Transcaucasia (Aliev 1984). The philologist, G. A. Geibullaev, went even further and identified all the Albanians as a Turkic-speaking population; he presented their “Arran language” as Turkic, and ascribed their early writing system to the Turks (Geibullaev 1984). The last point in this story was made by the physical anthropologist, R. M. Kasymova, who made every effort to trace the formation of the biological Azeri type from the Palaeolithic (Kasymova 1984).

Despite the poverty of the authors’ arguments, the volume was a clear

manifestation of the appearance of a new concept of the formation of the Azeri people. Now, the latter must have spoken Turkic from the very beginning, rather than being only a genuinely indigenous people. To put it another way, Turkic and indigenous status finally got married. Thus, the Azeri people reentered the family of Turkic peoples. Neither Media nor Atropatene had anything to do with that, and they were not mentioned at all. All this excited the Azeri intellectuals, and the volume in question was considered an “important landmark in Azeri historical literature” (Mamedov 1990).

The volume had opened a Pandora’s box, and the Azeri academic field was flooded with numerous pseudo-scholarly publications whose authors did their best, first to prove the incredibly deep roots of Turkic in the region, and second, to identify various ancient peoples with the Turks and to settle them over vast territories. Turkic appropriation of the remote past commenced. An Azeri linguist, A. Mamedov, argued strenuously for Sumerian-Turkic linguistic similarities (Mamedov 1984. For a criticism, see Aliev 1988a: 63-64). These were a subject of fascination for Turkic intellectuals, after the publication of the controversial novel “Az i ya”, by the Kazakh poet, Oljas Suleimenov, in Alma-Ata in 1975 (for that, see Buniatov 1987). A foreign observer treated the latter as an “anti-scientific revival” with features of a “colonial revolt” (Diat 1984). This definition fits the school of the Azeri revisionists to no less extent, with the only difference that, in contrast to Suleimenov, its advocates were considered true scholars.

While perceiving perestroika as a call for the rejection of former dogmas, the revisionists rushed to revise all the established views, including those that had been well confirmed by generations of various scholars. Through Alijarov’s lips, the revisionists maintained that the identification of the Iranian-speaking Medes with the Azeri ancestors was the heritage of Stalin’s era, and one should totally turn it down (Alijarov 1988). The search for early Turkic-speakers in the Middle East seemed to be a promising alternative.

One of the most active revisionists, a specialist in Oriental studies and a professor at the Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute, Yu. B. Yusifov, manifested lots of enthusiasm for this issue. He found Turkic-speakers in the Near East in the 3rd – 1st Millennia B.C., argued for the emergence of a Turkic Azeri language in the 3rd – 7th centuries, and for the completion of the Azeri people’s formation in the 7th – 8th centuries. He did his best to represent the Azeris, speaking Turkic, as the true indigenous inhabitants who, for centuries, lived side by side with the Iranians (Yusifov 1987). Yusifov emphatically objected to the then common practice of identifying the Azeri ancestors with Media and Caucasian Albania natives who initially spoke Iranian and North Caucasian languages, and shifted to Turkic only under the Seljuqs. He referred to two place names, “Aratta” and “Ushkaia”, identified them as Turkic without any reserve, and, as a result, argued that Turkic-speakers inhabited the Lake Urmia area from the Early Bronze Age (Yusifov 1987: 102, 1988a: 17-19)³⁸). He demonstrated no less enthusiasm when he tried to revise the Scythian linguistic affiliation and endowed they were bilingual; in his view,

they were fluent in both Iranian and Turkic. Moreover, he claimed that they had arrived in Azerbaijan long before the 7th century B.C. (though there is no evidence of any Scythians there, then, at all! V. Sh.).

On this basis, he revised the linguistic affiliations of several well-known archaeological cultures. Now, not only the Scythian and the Andronovo cultures had to be filled with the Turkic elements, but even the Kura-Arax culture of the Early Bronze Age – widespread in Transcaucasia and northern areas of the Near East – was firmly connected with the “proto-Azeris” (Yusifov 1988a: 19-20, 1989b)³⁹.

Whereas Yusifov tried to be cautious and wrote only of the “bilingualism” of the Scythians and some other related groups, the philologist, G. A. Geibullaev, listed all of them within a Turkic entity without any reserve. He maintained that until the 19th century, i.e., before Transcaucasia was annexed by Russia, both northern and southern Azerbaijan were inhabited by the same ethnic community, that the closely related Atropatenian and Albanian peoples had developed there from early times, and that they both had contributed to the Azeri people’s formation. He believed that the formation of the “Turkic-speaking Atropatenian people” took place in Media from the 4th century B.C. By the time that he began to write his book, the name “Atropatenian people”, unknown in the past, became so common in Azeri literature that Geibullaev considered it possible to go slightly further and to claim that the term “Atropatenians” was the self-definition of the Median inhabitants (Geibullaev 1991: 39-40. For a criticism, see Aliev 1988a: 65-66, 1989a: 92, 1990b). True, he recognized that Iranian-speaking “Azeris” lived there as well, but he insisted that the “proto-Turks” made up the bulk of the local population. This concept required no Turkification at all, since the indigenous people were declared to be Turks from the very beginning. Moreover, in contrast to what professional linguists taught, Geibullaev argued that Oghuz speech came to the Azerbaijan territory not with the arrival of the Oghuz people in the 11th century, but many centuries earlier - with the Hunns and Pechenegs (? V. Sh.).

While analyzing tribal and place names in the territory of Azerbaijan, the author based his views on quite arbitrary reasoning rather than thoughtful linguistic study. He used any scrap of archaeological, physical anthropological, or ethnographic data to prove that the Scythians, Sakae, Sarmatians, and early Media inhabitants were Turkic-speakers. Since archaeologists had defined the Scythian entity through cultural homogeneity, Geibullaev objected to the identification of an archaeological culture with an ethnic group. He assumed that a uniform culture could be an umbrella for different ethnic groups, and that a burial rite was not a reliable ethnic indicator (Geibullaev 1991: 284-285, 288). One would certainly agree that there are no rigid bonds between archaeological culture and ethnic group (Shnirelman 1993), but there are no good reasons to rely too much on retrospective methodology, either. Nonetheless, Geibullaev – armed with the latter – emphasized the cultural continuity between the steppe Scythian cultures and the later Turkic ones, and interpreted this as evidence of linguistic continuity (Geibullaev 1991: 291), despite the fact that Scythian is reliably identified as an Iranian language by

all the specialists. Thus, Geibullaev chose only those methodological tools that might help to confirm his highly ethnocentric concept, and threw away all the rest.

In the meantime, unscrupulousness and poverty of methodology caused serious disagreements among the revisionists themselves. Thus, whereas many of them were searching for a Turkic homeland for the Azeris where they live today, Geibullaev was quite positive that a homeland might be located in southern Siberia and the Altai Mountains (Geibullaev 1991: 308).

While demonstrating a skeptical attitude towards archaeology and historical linguistics, Geibullaev based his conclusions on very scarce data about place names, which could be interpreted quite differently. He revealed accidental lexical coincidences and, on this basis, made conclusions about early Turkic speech⁴⁰). He relied completely on the testimony of early authors and avoided any criticism of historical sources. In contrast, he rejected other scholars' views if they contradicted his own, and did not make any attempt to analyze their arguments. He accused his opponents of Eurocentrism, attachment to the "scholastic" Indo-European concept as if the latter never considered the achievements of Turkic studies. In this way, he swept aside any objections of his views as politicized and, thus, unjust (Geibullaev 1991: 9, 283, 288).

At the same time, he was by no means a purist himself. For example, this is how he explained why the Azeri people had come onto the scene long before the 11th century. Indeed, in this case the Iranian scholars would lose ground for considering Nizami and some other famous medieval cultural activists Persians (Geibullaev 1991: 48). Instructively, even the editor of his book, I. Babaev, had to say he considered the main points of his concept very disputable or even unconvincing, although he recognized the value of some of his etymologies (Geibullaev 1991: 3-7).

In the end of the 1980s, the revisionist views were summed up by two Azeri Doctors of Philology, E. Alibeizade and K. Veliev, specialists in the history of Azeri language and literature. They distinguished three periods in the history of the Azeri language – Sumerian, Scythian-Turkic and Turkic. In fact, they pushed the reader back to the pan-Turkic concepts of the Turkish authors of the 1930s – 1940s. They identified the Early Bronze Age Kura-Arax archaeological culture with a Turkic-speaking population, and called its territory the "true land of our ancestors of Sumerian-Turkic origins". Would one be surprised that, after that, they ascribed the achievements of the Sumerian culture to the "early Azeris", identified the "Epic of Gilgamesh" with the Azeri epic "Dede Korkud", saw the early "Sumerians-Turks" resettled from Mesopotamia to the Yenisei River Valley, and then, turning them into the Scythians, sent them back to Transcaucasia through Central Asia? At the same time, with reference to Buniatov's earlier publications, the authors maintained that Azerbaijan was populated by Turks long before the Arab conquest, and tried to impose Turkic ancestry on most of the early Azerbaijan inhabitants.

Quite paradoxically, combining both hyper-migrationist and hyper-autochthonist concepts, the authors stated that there were no grounds to speak of the

'non-indigenous' nature of the Azeris and their late "Turkification". Curiously, they presented their concept as an important contribution to the struggle against the "distortion of the past" that caused inter-ethnic hostility. Even more instructive was that their article had been published by the main organ of the CC CPA, the "Communists of Azerbaijan" magazine. This means that by the end of the 1980s the Azerbaijan Communist authorities had begun to demonstrate openly their sympathy with pan-Turkic ideas. It is no accident that the authors blamed the Soviet struggle against "pan-Turkism" and "pan-Islamism" as a legacy of the cult of personality that had to be discarded (Alibeizade, Veliev 1989).

Simultaneously, the newspaper "Youth of Azerbaijan", the organ of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Comsomol, published an article whose authors were irritated with I. Aliev's concept, as though it identified the Azeris with "Turkified Persians". The authors put into question the Iranian affiliation of the Medes and Atropatenians, and argued that separate Median and Atropatenian languages were but a fiction. They also doubted that the Medes, Atropatenians and Albanians might be any well-integrated ethnic communities. In their view, all of these were numerous tribes with different languages, including Turkic. It was just these Turkic-speakers, rather than any later Turkic nomads, who made up the core for the further development of the Azeri people (Balaev, Kambarov 1988).

The revisionist views became especially popular in the very late 1980s – early 1990s when they were encouraged by both APF and CPA leaders, who tried to recruit the same pan-Turkic slogans for their own benefit. They were disseminated by the major Azeri scholars, rather than merely by writers and journalists. For example, in the fall 1991, the popular magazine, "Vozrozhdenie" (Revival), advocated the following ideas. The Oghuz began to settle in Azerbaijan before the Christian era; they gave the names "Ich Oghuz" and "Dysh Oghuz" to early Atropatene and Caucasian Albania; the latter were unified within the same early state (Djamshidov 1991: 34-35); Zoroaster was of Azeri origin; and "Avesta" was composed in the land of ancient Azerbaijan (Kuli-Zade 1991: 29)⁴¹. Recently, the Azeri revisionist view of history is carving its way into western literature (for example, see van der Leeuw 2000).

In 1992, a candidate thesis was defended at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the author of which argued that the Russes who attacked the Shirvan cities in the 10th century were in fact Bulgars who had nothing to do with Kievan Rus. He identified a well-known medieval term, "Sakalab", with the "Turkic Bulgars" part of whom were those Russes (Aleksperov 1992: 22-26). This is how contemporary Azeri scholars attempt to cleanse early medieval Transcaucasia of any associations with the Kievan Rus, and thus with Russia.

The revisionist school emerged at the time when interest in southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan revived once again in the Azerbaijan SSR. As in the 1960s, they had once again begun to talk in Baku of "Iranian Oriental despotism" and the "Iranian yoke", and of the great rulers of the Safavi dynasty who had united the whole

Turkic population within one and the same state. The attitude towards the Arabs changed: whereas they were represented as bloodthirsty conquerors in former days, now they were appreciated as those who had united northern and southern Azerbaijan for the first time, thus, laying the groundwork for Azeri consolidation into an integrated body (Sumbatzade 1987: 134). This idea seemed a fresh one, deserving further development. In 1978, Buniiatov published the book, "The Atabeg State of Azerbaijan", dealing with the medieval state that embraced all the territories of both northern and southern Azerbaijan in pre-Mongol times (Buniiatov 1978)⁴²). This was evident from the map that supplemented the book; the map was so important that Buniiatov republished it in 1991 (Buniiatov 1991: 18-19). True, at the end of the 1970s all these ideas were available only to a narrow circle of Azeri intellectuals and were not intended for the general public.

The political and intellectual climate was changing across the border as well. Broadcasting in Azeri started in Iran, and this awakened the interest of that minority in its ethnic affiliation; the Turkic theme together with pan-Turkism assumed a high profile in southern Azerbaijan (Swietochowski 1995: 169, 171-172). All these changes were the result of the Iranian revolution, after which numerous newspapers, magazines, and books in Azeri began to be issued in various regions of Iran, where large pockets of Azeris lived. At that time, leaflets calling for the establishment of an Azerbaijan Islamic Republic were disseminated in Tabriz. In 1979-1981, Soviet propaganda aimed at Iran revived. It called for the free development of the Azeri language and spoke against pan-Iranism. Azeri writers from both sides of the border began to openly criticize the "feudal-bourgeois chauvinism" of the former regime (Nissman 1987: 47-50; Swietochowski 1995: 189-191; Nuriev 1988). Among the leaders of the Iranian revolution were Azeri intellectuals who believed that the process of democratization would result in the granting of a status of political autonomy to the Azeri provinces. Although the Azeri leaders did demonstrate their loyalty to Iran, they also promoted cultural and linguistic nationalism. The Azeri media emphasized the idea that every people (*xalk*) had the right to develop its own national (*milli*) culture, identity and language, and that, although the Azeris together with the Iranians participated in the building of the Iranian culture, they retained their own identity and culture (Shaffer 2000: 452-456).

In 1982, the Soviet propaganda began to use the irredentist slogan "one Azerbaijan", which meant that people of the same language and culture would unite earlier or later within one and the same state. Even Heydar Aliiev took up this idea. In the meantime, being alarmed by the growth of Azeri nationalism, Iranian authorities began to abolish Azeri-language newspapers and magazines, and to persecute those politicians who demonstrated sympathy with Azeri claims. By the end of 1980, it became clear that the Azeri movement had once again suffered defeat in Iran. Since that time, Soviet Azeri writers manifested their special desire to treat both parts of Azerbaijan as one and the same body, and the Arax River as its "bleeding injury" (Nissman 1987: 69-77; Swietochowski 1995: 191-192). An

interest in the events in Iran in the mid-1940s was revived; in particular, what seemed important to Azeri intellectuals was how the local media awakened national self-awareness among the Iranian Azeris at that time (Mustafaev 1991). The theme turned out to be a hot one, and it is no accident that it was in 1980 that Buniatov was awarded the State Prize of Azerbaijan for his book, "The Atabeg State of Azerbaijan".

The pan-Azeri attitude was granted official support during perestroika, when nationalism was rapidly growing in Azerbaijan, they began to discuss issues of language and culture, and formerly forbidden terms like "nationalism" and "pan-Turkism" began to be fashionable once again. All this enjoyed the sympathy of the party bosses. Suffice it to note that the "Vatan" (Motherland) Association was established in the beginning of 1988, after a special decree of the CC CPA. It focused on the development of cultural relationships with Azeris abroad, especially in Iran (Gajiev, Djafarov 1988). In March 1991, the CC CPA decreed the erection of a memorial center dedicated to the epic "Dede Korkud", an important symbol of Azeri nationalism, glorifying early Oghuz feats and describing a uniform state embracing the lands of both northern and southern Azerbaijan (Djamshidov 1991: 33). As we know, the history of Atropatene had already become an integral part of the ethnogenetic myth in Soviet Azerbaijan. That is why the cultural history of Iranian Azerbaijan was presented in Baku museums as an inseparable part of the general history of Azerbaijan. In this way, the important grounds for Azeri identity were established, and this trend could not escape Iranian Azerbaijan, where a movement for the full rights of Azeris was growing (Shaffer 2000: 460, 468).

This political and intellectual climate was very favorable for the development of a revisionist school. It is reasonable to assume that the thirst for a Turkic homeland in Transcaucasia or the Middle East had a lot to do with Soviet Azerbaijan claims for the lands of southern Azerbaijan situated in Iran (Nissman 1987: 10). These romantic attitudes were especially promoted, in the very late 1980s, when Azeri nationalism was actively searching for its position in Azerbaijan society, and pan-Turkic ideas, with their political connotations, seemed very tempting (Goldenberg 1994: 57). Just after its establishment, the APF considered the rapprochement of both Azerbaijanians one of its most crucial goals. In 1988-1989, the APF organized several meetings in Nakhjivan, where they discussed the issue of regular communications between people of northern and southern Azerbaijan, but the local authorities were less willing to meet these demands (Korchagin 1990). An APF program of 1989 recommended the strengthening of economic and cultural relationships with Iranian Azerbaijan, although a revision of the state borders was out of question (Altstadt 1992: 205). At the same time, when the frontier installations at the Soviet-Iranian border were destroyed by a crowd in December 1989, people following the leaders of the local Nakhjivan branch of the APF demanded unification with Iranian Azerbaijan (Korchagin 1990; Gafarly 1999). This slogan was supported by Azeri Academicians, who compared the division of Azerbaijan with that of Vietnam or Korea and treated it as an artificial and unjust

situation.

Thus, it is no accident that the ideas of the “revisionist school” were shared by the APF leader A. Elchibey (Astourian 1994: 62), who openly oriented himself to Turkey, promoted Turkic nationalism and used to refer to the great Turkic heritage in his public speeches (Furman 1993: 22, 1994: 156, 164). For example, Elchibey wrote a positive afterword for the above mentioned article by Mirza Bala, published in the “Azerbaijan” magazine (A. Aliev 1989). In order to impose Turkic identity on the Azeris, Elchibey changed the name of the language from “Azeri” to “Turkic” and got this approved by the Azerbaijan parliament, Milli-Majles (Stupishin 1999: 7). At the same time, he was quite negative towards Iran, and at the beginning of 1992 called upon the Iranian Azeris to unite with their northern brothers in order to establish “Greater Azerbaijan” (Goldenberg 1994: 121; Croissant 1998: 83). Meanwhile, the majority of the Iranian Azeris do not share all these ideas, and demonstrated double loyalty – Azeri and Iranian (Swietochowski 1995: 199-200, 202-203, 209; Shaffer 2000: 471). Heydar Aliev, who replaced Elchibey as the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, avoided irritating Iran and tried to maintain friendly relations with it (Goldenberg 1994: 57, 123). At the same time, he shared his predecessor’s pan-Turkic attitude and represented Turkey as the second homeland of the Azeris (Stupishin 1999: 7). He openly demonstrated all of this during his successful visit to Turkey in the end of October 1998.

In the meantime, the emergence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the fall of 1991 and TV program reception from Turkey from 1992 stirred up Azeri nationalism in Iran once again. The image of the “Turks” had changed: instead of backward peasants, they were presented now as a well-trained, prosperous population. At the same time, the Azeri self-designation was undergoing change; the term “Azeri” was coming to replace the former “Turks”. In 1990, Tabriz University students demanded an upgrade of the status of Azeri, and in 1993 the Azeri delegates in the Iranian Majles united in order to defend the rights of the Azeris to promote their native language. Finally, sixty leading Azeri intellectuals called on president Khatami in 1998 to extend both the cultural and linguistic rights of the Iranian Azeris; while doing that, they referred to the Republic of Azerbaijan. Over the last ten years, relationships between both Azerbaijanians have kept on strengthening. The Iranian Azeris support the Republic of Azerbaijan in its dramatic conflict with Armenia for Nagorny Karabagh. In addition, direct business contacts have been established between the Republic of Azerbaijan and those provinces of Iran populated by the Azeris.

At the same time, the process of rapprochement is not developing as smoothly as the Azeri nationalists expected. The first contacts have already confused both sides by demonstrating the significant cultural and religious differences between them. The “northerners” were struck by the loyalty to Islam of the “southerners”, and treated them as incorrigible conservatives, and the “southerners” were shocked with what they interpreted as a high level of Russification among the “northerners”. Each side presents itself as more civilized than the other (Shaffer 2000: 461-470).

Thus, the pan-Turkic project of the Azeri democratic romantics turned out to fit poorly the much more complicated reality.

CHAPTER 12

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE “CONSERVATIVES” AND THE “REVISIONISTS”, AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

Pan-Turkic ideas by no means fascinated Igrar G. Aliev, who was already the Director of the Baku Institute of History by that time. He treated all the concepts of the “revisionist school” as amateur views and emphasized that, as a rule, the scholars who put them forward and advocate them were incompetent in dead languages and/or far from the historical profession. He demonstrated that the affiliation of Scythian with Iranian was well-established: the names of gods, kings, distinct tribes and areas, as well as customs, rituals, and mythology – all of these together with about 200 Scythian words – had convincing Iranian parallels. On the other hand, there was no linguistic evidence at all of any Turkic presence, even minor, among the Scythians. As concerned the would-be “Turkic” inscription from the Issyk mound (Kazakhstan) of the Scythian period, which was the common point of reference for the “revisionists”, Aliev remarked that similar inscriptions were well known in the vast territories from Kazakhstan to Afghanistan and were, certainly, part of the early Iranian world. He had no difficulty with another “revisionist” argument, that the Byzantines used the name “Scythians” extensively to refer to the Turkic tribes of the east European steppes; indeed, for the Byzantines this name had already lost its ethnic connotations, they traditionally used it for any nomads, and not only for those!

Aliev emphatically objected to any identification of early inhabitants of Media, Atropatene and Caucasian Albania with the Turks. He provided convincing evidence of an Iranian affiliation of the Median and Atropatenian languages, advocated his own suggestion of the existence of an Atropatenian people, and indignantly rejected the assumption that the “Median issue” was imposed on the Azeris by Stalin. He treated revisionist activity as a pernicious attempt to isolate the Azeri past from the Median-Atropatenian milieu and, thus, to break their cultural continuity. Indeed, it is the latter, he taught, that provides the Azeris with a unique chance to consider themselves heirs of both early local culture and the culture of the Iranian world! Finally, he warned against hasty and incautious identifications of ethnic/tribal names with language and ethnic affiliation (Aliev 1986a, 1988a, 1989a, 1989c: 33-34, 1990. Also see Buniatov 1987)⁴³). Yet, as we can see, this latter argument allowed him to reject the data that contradicted the chosen concept, which was advantageously used by the revisionists themselves!

While analyzing the “revisionist” constructions, Aliev demonstrated their methodological poverty and inexperience in the field of study. He had every kind of reason to treat many of them as amateurs, and explained their faults with “poor professional training”. To put it other way, in respect to this phenomenon he used an internal approach from within scholarship and avoided considering the socio-political context of their activity. It was unsafe to discuss the latter, and therefore Aliev acknowledged honestly that it was “difficult for him to disclose all the reasons for the aforementioned... faults of the historical-philological works”. Yet, he made the reader aware of those reasons: “it was highly tempting when the point of a misunderstood national feeling was at stake, such as the problem of the Turks in early Azerbaijan, for many people to lose their reason”. Moreover, he recognized that the importance of the issue in question went far beyond the narrow framework of the academic field: “the study of the ethnic history of any people is of great interest, and not only cognitive, it is important from the point of real politics” (Aliev 1988a: 59, 66, 68. Also see Aliev 1990; Buniatov 1988). The Soviet scholar was not able to go deeper into that, for it took him off into politics, which threatened him with serious problems. That is why an “externalist” approach towards a scholarly field was impossible in the USSR during recent decades, although a Soviet scholar has introduced this approach (for that, see Graham 1998: 164).

All of this affected the fate of Aliev himself, for in the end of the 1980s he was simultaneously attacked by the newspaper “Youth of Azerbaijan”, and the popular journal, “Azerbaijan”. The cause for that was a delay in the publication of a 9-volume “History of Azerbaijan”: the project had been started by the staff of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1971, but it was still not completed by the turn of the 1990s. A writer in the newspaper “Youth of Azerbaijan”, referred to the Azeris’ poor knowledge of their own history, the lack or the poor quality of textbooks in history and to the worthlessness of the historical concepts, which made up the core of the 3-volume edition from the late 1950s (Agaev 1988).

After that, the aforementioned article by A. Balaev and I. Kambarov was published. It depicted a depressing climate at the Baku Institute of History – the reigning factions, the conjuncture, the conformism, the lack of freedom of discussion, the habit of labeling opponents, the poor development of archaeological and ethnographic studies, and even cases of falsification of history of the Azeri people. The authors claimed this was all the responsibility of the Director of the Institute, I. Aliev (Balaev, Kambarov 1988).

In response, Aliev referred to the complexity of the task and promised that the first volume of the new “History of Azerbaijan” would come out very soon. Unsatisfied with his explanation, the newspaper arranged a wide discussion that, on the one hand, revealed the great public interest in the publication of the series, and on the other hand confirmed that bad trends developed at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR and, in particular, at the Institute of History. It is curious that

the majority of those participating in the discussion were far from the historical profession (13 of 25 persons), and five of the twelve historians who took part were affiliated with the Institute of History. Seven of the participants openly defended revisionism and demonstrated great interest in the problem of the “early Turks” in Azerbaijan. This approach was not shared by the Institute staff, and three of them agreed with Aliev, to the extent that they said ethnogenetic issues should be discussed by specialists rather than by the general public, and that the revisionist approach demonstrated non-professionalism and simplification based on a “misunderstood patriotism”. Moreover, the revisionists were accused that, while having every chance to discuss and publish their ideas without any restrictions, they proved to be unable to put forward any consistent concept of Azeri ethnogenesis (for example, see Namazov 1988; Djafarov 1988; Yunusov 1988).

At the same time, these participants in the discussion also criticized the unfavorable climate at the Institute – the stifled feelings, the gerontocracy, the lack of free discussions, the inability or unwillingness of the directorship to organize effective creative activities (Mamedova 1988; Namazov 1988). They also argued that school textbooks were out of date and that the importance of the history of Azerbaijan was underestimated in schools (Yunusova 1988). In brief, one of the hottest issues concerned Azeri youth – their education, employment and scholarly careers. Indeed, in those days the newspaper published an article by a well-known Azeri historian who recognized that the leaders of Azeri science were too old, that it was by no means easy for younger people to develop a career, and that over the last decades the effectiveness of the Institute of History had declined (Ismailov 1988).

All of these arguments revealed the true reason for the attacks against Aliev: at the end of the 1980s, elections of the directors of academic institutes had to be arranged for the first time in the history of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The revisionists, who represented the younger generation of Azeri historians, were preparing the ground for a victorious battle for the directorship and other promising positions. True, at that time they failed, and the discussions in “Youth of Azerbaijan” ceased.

Then the revisionists chose the popular Turkic language journal, “Azerbaijan”, and the newspaper with the same name as their new battlefield. While representing the revisionists’ constructions as recently discovered final truths, one of the authors attacked Aliev as if the latter had distorted history to hide valuable information about a local Turkic homeland in Transcaucasia. Aliev was charged with having political faults as well – sympathy with pan-Iranism, participation in the Soviet policy of the de-nationalization of peoples and even assisting those who had turned the Azeri ancestors into “newcomers-assimilators” and treated them as “unwelcome guests”. As an example of his distortion of history, the author cited Aliev’s opinion that the term “Azerbaijan” derived from “Atropatene” and that the latter was connected with the name Atropat. The author argued that all of these were incorrect, and that Atropat had never existed at all, as Yampol’sky had demonstrated (sic! V. Sh.). Instead, the author did his best to prove that “Avesta” was composed by Turks

who lived near Lake Urmia⁴⁴). The only point that the author shared with Aliev was that ethnogenetic studies were “important in real politics” (Mamedov 1990). Another writer on this subject in the “Azerbaijan” newspaper also blamed Aliev for underestimating the Turks’ role in Caucasian Albania, and accused him of Eurocentrism and “pan-Indo-Europeanism” (Khachyly 1989).

The aspiration of one of those authors to put Bactriana close to Lake Urmia and make it a Turkic state was very similar to the ideas of Mirza Bala who, forty years before that, tried to call Parthia a Turkic state (Bala 1989). It is no accident that his ideas were appreciated by the same Baku “Azerbaijan” journal at the end of the 1980s. It is also worth recalling that the afterword of this out of date article was written by Elchibey. He paid special attention to the pre-Islamic Turkic religion of Tengrianism, associated the name “Alban” with it, included an early history of Azerbaijan in the general history of the Turkic world and hinted that Caucasian Albania also played a part in this history (Aliev 1989. For that, also see Astourian 1994: 66-67).

The same ideas were advocated by the abovementioned historian, Alijarov, in “Azerbaijan” journal in 1988. However, he went even further. Not only did he treat “Alban” as a Turkic word, but did his best to isolate the population of Caucasian Albania from its North Caucasian roots, and he called it “part of the Oghuz ethnos” (for that, see Astourian 1994: 65). Yet, in articles published in the West he omitted this argument. There, he pointed out that the majority of the Albanians were Turkified to the extent that they made up the basis of the Azeri people. True, he agreed that the Armenians had incorporated another segment. At the same time, he emphasized the existence of a political continuity that stretched from the Albanian Kingdom to the Safavi Empire and then on to the Karabagh Khanate. He also argued that no independent Armenian state had ever existed in Transcaucasia (Vahabzade, Aliyarov 1988; Alijarly 1996: 117-118).

Nonetheless, until the very beginning of the 1990s, the mainstream of the Azeri academic world and Azeri education still put forth Aliev’s and Buniatov’s concepts. They were the basis of the popular volume, “History of Azerbaijan”, completed by the Institute of History. This was first published in 1979 and was republished in a slightly revised edition in 1994. The chapter on the early history of Azerbaijan was written by Aliev. In general, it reproduced his view of the deep historical roots of Azeri statehood as though there was unbroken political continuity from the very early 1st Millennium B.C. He also pointed to the crucial importance of local Caucasian ethnic elements in the formation of the Azeri people, and especially emphasized the “Atropatenian Median people” with their Iranian language, who were in fact at the roots of the early Azeri state and culture. Caucasian Albania was another no less important component of this development, and it was localized within Soviet Azerbaijan and southern Daghestan. Instructively, in this regard the author especially noted that all of the right bank of the Kura River Basin was included (Guliev 1979: 23-42). What was new in Aliev’s publication was his idea of very early polities (“countries”) in northwestern Iran on

the eve of the 1st Millennium B.C. (Guliev 1979: 23-24). In his former works, Aliev had been more careful and warned against uncritical interpretation of the terms “countries” and “kings” known from Assyrian sources as evidence of true statehood (Aliev 1960: 40-42, 170-172). Yet, even Aliev’s quite cautious earlier approach to the “countries” was criticized by the reviewers, who remarked that the scarce information at hand made it absolutely impossible to interpret the nature of those “countries” (Melikishvili et al. 1962: 126, 131)⁴⁵.

The next chapter, on Caucasian Albania, followed Buniiatov’s views. The independent status of the Albanian Kingdom, throughout the early medieval period until the Arab invasion was advocated. The Sussanian dominance in the mid-1st Millennium A.D. was recognized but considered nominal and brief. In particular, while mentioning the construction of strong fortifications under the Sussanians, the author especially emphasized that they were built by local people. Not only kings, but also the highest priests of Caucasian Albania were claimed to be local and quite independent. There was no question of a role for the Armenian Church. It was maintained that the Albanian writing system was invented in the beginning of the 5th century, by the “Albanians, Benjamin and Jeremy”; there was no place for Mesrob Mashtots there. Instead, it was argued that there was an extensive Albanian literature and that the famous “History of the Albanians” was initially completed in Albanian, although only a copy “translated into Armenian” survived. The right bank of the Kura River Basin was unreservedly included in Albanian lands and populated by the Albanians alone. Armenian participation in the local life was totally ignored (Guliev 1979: 49-53). The completion of the Azeri people’s formation was related to the spread of Oghuz in the 11th – 12th centuries; yet, it was maintained that the local inhabitants were more advanced in cultural terms than the Seljuq nomads, and that they assimilated the latter rather than vice-versa. Thus, despite all the language replacements, ultimately the Azeris turned out to be the direct descendants of the local early inhabitants, and the autochthonist concept celebrated its victory (Guliev 1979: 63).

The same views were the basis of a secondary school textbook on the history of Azerbaijan that was republished many times in the 1970s – 1980s. True, some Armenian participation in the formation of the population and culture of the region was recognized in that text. It was also mentioned that from time to time Artsakh was ruled by the Armenian kings and that Armenian migrants resettled there, and merged with the local inhabitants. The name of Mesrob Mashtots was mentioned, but it was said that he “put in order” the Albanian alphabet rather than invented it. At the same time, the author of the “History of the Albanians”, Moses of Kalankatui, was called the Albanian chronicler. In order to prove that Albanian literature existed, the textbook was supplemented by a drawing of an early medieval Albanian inscription on a clay lamp that had been discovered in Mingechaur (Guliev 1972: 20, 27). In respect to the formation of the Azeri people, the textbook insisted that local inhabitants played the major role in that. True, it was recognized that Turkic was introduced by numerous waves of nomadic people. It was also said,

however, that they brought about nothing positive; quite the opposite, they were persistently associated with destruction and subjugation. Only the descendants of the early indigenous people were represented as the bearers of a higher culture: they assimilated the newcomers, and language replacement was by no means associated with any shift in population (Guliev 1972: 25, 38-39, 44-45).

Thus, the continuing anti-religious struggle, on the one hand, and Soviet suspicions towards the Turks, on the other, excluded both Islam and Turkic from those resources the Azeris might use in order to shape their identity. That is why they emphasized so much their links with the territory. Indeed, that was the only ground left for their claims to authenticity; this puzzled the Armenian scholars, though (for example, see Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 181; Melik-Oganjanian 1968: 171, 181-182; Ulubabian 188: 85). Moreover, being affected by Soviet internationalism, they initially tried to find the sort of ancestors who could move them closer to the Armenians, and discovered them in the early Iranian world (Medes). Yet, the events of the very late 1940s demonstrated that tensions still existed between the Armenians and the Azeris; it became clear that neither the former nor the latter were eager to become close relatives. Moreover, the Armenians persistently treated the Azeris as backward nomads and merciless conquerors, encroaching on the heritage of the earlier high civilizations (Galanian et al. 1978: 102). In the 1980s, this attitude was openly expressed and widely disseminated by some Armenian writers (Zoryi Balaian, most of all), and, naturally, this insulted the Azeris (for that, see Ismailov 1989: 6, 37. Also see Van der Leeuw 2000: 19). In response, they used the same rhetoric and represented the early Armenians as nomadic pastoralists who had occupied the Armenian plateau by force (Ismailov 1989: 39-40).

One more important factor was the existence of a large Azeri enclave in Iran, where the Azeri right to develop their language and culture had been greatly restricted for decades. Their leaders were looking to the North and expected support from there. This met sympathy in Soviet Azerbaijan, and the Azeri nationalists never lost hope for the unification of both Azerbaijan, especially because these expectations were from time to time artificially fed by Soviet foreign policy. This climate was unfavorable to the idea of Iranian-speaking ancestors, and it soon declined. Instead, open anti-Iranism was promoted, which pressed scholars to play down the important role of the Iranian cultural heritage in the formation of Azeri culture. During the Soviet era, all of the aforementioned factors made Azeri scholars put forward several conflicting theories of the formation of the Azeri people.

1. A theory that associated the Azeri ancestors with Media provided the Azeris with the desired past and paved the way for the appropriation

of the historical heritage of the early civilizations of the Middle East. At the same time, it isolated the southern Azeris from Iran, constructed a distinct community out of them and legitimized their claims for political autonomy. Furthermore, it opened a perspective, albeit illusory, of irredentism and unification of southern Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, despite all the contrivance of its authors, this theory provided the Azeris with Iranian-speaking ancestors, which was unacceptable for the reasons discussed above.

2. The Albanian theory provided the Soviet Azeris with the status of an indigenous ethnic group and also made them heirs of a very early culture. It also enriched them with historical arguments for claims to the Nagorny Karabakh lands.

Both theories intentionally isolated the Azeris from the Turkic world. Indeed, at first the Soviet authorities were quite suspicious about the Turks and several times used punitive measures against them. Second, the Soviet historical approach had formed a negative stereotype of the Turks as backward nomads who occupied themselves only with plundering raids and were unable to build a culture of their own; that was why they used to appropriate the cultures of other peoples. These views about the Turks were especially common among the Armenians and Georgians. Bearing all this in mind, Azeri scholars did their best to provide their people with different ancestors. They searched for them among settled farmers with early, well-advanced cultures. An attempt to distance themselves from the Turkish people who massacred the Armenians in 1915 also played an important role in this strategy.

At the same time, the image of the Turks began to lose its negative connotations with the increase of the Turkic population in the USSR, the growth of their educational status and the economic power of their republics, and the indigenization of the bureaucratic elites of those republics. The prestige of Turkic languages had grown as well. The negation by the Turkic scholars of their remote ancestors' Turkic language was perceived now with surprise and discontent. An obvious role in that was played by the primordialist attitude that reigned in the Soviet school during the most recent pre-perestroika decades, when the absolute value of a pure ethnic tradition was emphasized. Under the great pressure of Russification, implemented especially after 1950s, language shift began to be treated by the general public as something shameful, as treachery to the people's interest. This fervent attitude towards the mother tongue became one of the most important manifestations of the passive resistance of non-Russian ethnic groups to the processes of "rapprochement and

merger” that were highly advocated by Soviet officials in the 1960s – 1970s (Rakowska-Harmstone 1986: 251). In this environment the revisionist school became active in Azerbaijan, and the third theory of the formation of the Azeri people came onto the scene.

3. The Azeri revisionists kept emphasizing their early local cultural heritage in order to claim indigenous status, and thus, the right to all the local territories, based on the traditional first settler principle. At the same time, they gradually began to Turkify the early indigenous inhabitants. Thus, although they still insisted on a long Azeri cultural continuity rooted in Caucasian Albania, now the Albanians were converted into the Turkic-speaking population. Early nomads (Scythians, Sakae, and the like) who invaded the Caspian lowlands from time to time, also turned out to be Turkic-speakers and were included in the list of Azeri ancestors.

The simultaneous use of all these approaches was clear evidence that, as was once pointed by Ch. Lemerrier-Quellejey (Lemerrier-Quellejey 1984), the formation of the Azeri nation has not been completed yet. Indeed, the concepts in question and the struggle between them demonstrated that Azeri intellectuals were persistently searching for a solid basis for their identity. Some of them were dreaming of consolidation on a territorial basis, and they chiefly emphasized political and cultural continuity (the Median and Albanian theories). Others associated ethnicity with language affiliation, and were mostly attracted to pan-Turkic constructions.

The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was no less important than its identity. Yet, it was threatened by the particular demands of ethnic minorities, the Armenians most of all. That is why the Azeri versions of the ethnogenesis of the Azeri people were so variable – each of them was aimed at its own target. The Median concept had to legitimize the unity of northern and southern Azerbaijanians that was an especially hot issue in the 1940s, when the Soviet authorities were ready for the partition of Iran. The Albanian idea provided arguments for the territorial integrity of Soviet Azerbaijan and served to oppose the Armenian claims to the right side of the Kura River Basin. As concerned pan-Turkic constructions, they were aimed at the consolidation of the Azeris on the basis of language, and thus met the demands of the Soviet model of ethnic consolidation much better than the two other concepts. At the same time, the late arrival of Turkic-speakers to the region was their Achilles heel. That is why their authors did their best to push the Turkic presence in the region as far into the past as possible, even if this contradicted all the historical evidence at hand.

The tendency to keep pushing the history of Azerbaijan further back to the past continued in the 1990s, when Azerbaijan became an independent national state. In late 1998, the first two volumes of the 7-volume series, “History of

Azerbaijan”, produced by the Institute of History, were finally published in Baku. In a report on that event, the newspaper, “Baku Worker” (January 14, 1999), argued: “Our scholars have proved with the help of irrefutable arguments based on new archaeological discoveries that Azerbaijan was one of the earliest regions of the world to be settled by humans and become a cultural center; our history is more than 1.5 million years old.” Thus, the Azeri intellectuals do their best to prove the Azeris’ indigenous status and to associate themselves with the territory of Azerbaijan, regardless of linguistic, religious and cultural factors. Ultimately, although the importance of all those factors was recognized, they were presented as the function of a territorial unity that was crucial for their development.

At the same time, while downplaying the role of language in shaping identity, the Azeri authors used the notion of local (territorial) loyalty, not only for themselves but also for their neighbors, and most of all the Armenians. Where the Armenians discovered an undoubted relationship based on a common language, the Azeris suspected a trick and manipulations because, as we know, they themselves emphasized mostly the place of birth and residence; at the same time, they downplayed language loyalty as something that was attendant and precarious. All of this expressed itself in opposite approaches to the identity issue, that were advocated by both sides in the course of the hot dispute that focused on the formation of the Nagorny Karabagh population.

CHAPTER 13

THE STRUGGLE FOR NAGORNY KARABAGH: THE CLASH OF MYTHS

During the first years of the Karabagh conflict, most Azeris and Armenians linked it to the recent past: the Azeris accused the Armenians of illegal claims to the lands of Azerbaijan, and the Armenians traced the beginning of the conflict from 1921, when Nagorny Karabagh was granted to Azerbaijan as a result of a quite complicated political intrigue. Beginning in the 1920s, the Armenians of Nagorny Karabagh could not help complaining of discrimination, and from time to time called for the unification of Nagorny Karabagh with the Armenian SSR (Libaridian 1988: 40-89; Grant 1991: 45). This claim was one of the most popular among those received by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s (Perechen' 1989: 162). At the same time, the Azeris laid their own claims, to the effect that the areas of Armenian SSR populated by Azeris had to undergo a change of status – either to be transformed into an Autonomous Region, or to be transferred to the Azerbaijan SSR (Perechen' 1989: 12-163. Also see Ismailov 1989d: 65). Depending on their own interpretation of the situation, the Armenians discussed the Karabagh issue in terms of a “liberation movement” or even a “struggle for survival”, and the Azeris – in terms of “aggression” and “occupation” (Dudwick 1995: 19-20).

Gradually, intellectuals on both sides began to strive to mobilize deeper layers of historical memory. Indeed, Karabagh played an important role in the historical and ethno-political views of both the Armenians and the Azeris. For the Armenians, first, this was the land where the continuous development of the Armenian people could be traced throughout centuries. Second, at least some political autonomy had been maintained there until recently. Third, there were numerous monuments of Armenian art and history there, in particular, the sepulcher of one of the first Christian missionaries, Bishop Gregory, who was killed in Derbent in A.D. 338. This is the oldest historical monument still surviving in the territory of the NKAR. Fourth, Nagorny Karabagh was the major center of the national liberation movement, formed in the 18th century, which had started the Armenian revival (Ioannisian 1947: 16-17; Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 7-22; Ulubabian 1989; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 72-74)⁴⁶.

At the same time, the Azeris viewed Karabagh as the homeland of many important figures in the science and culture of the 19th – 20th centuries, and Shusha

was considered the birthplace of Azeri musical culture (Alijarly 1996: 129. For that, see Suny 1993: 199). Even more important, the Azeris associated Karabagh with the hereditary lands of the Turkic khans, where the Azeri nation and nationalism began to arise in the late 19th century (Dudwick 1993b: 86, 89). In the Soviet era, colored by the rhetoric of the peoples' friendship and internationalism, the Armenians and Azeris were not able to claim the Nagorny Karabagh lands openly. Nonetheless, tensions between them were observed in this particular region throughout the Soviet era (Grant 1991: 45; Libaridian 1988; Walker 1991: 117-122; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 144-147). This was reflected in the heated discourse between Armenian and Azeri scholars, focused on early Caucasian Albania, its territorial borders, the ethnic composition of its population and its historical fate. Nowadays, it is well established that this seemingly scholarly dispute played a crucial role in the ideological struggle that preceded and accompanied the Karabagh conflict (Hewsen 1982; Oganjanian 1989; Dudwick 1990: 377-378; Astourian 1994: 58-61; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 51-108; Croissant 1998: 11-12; Tchilingirian 1999: 437).

A short overview of Karabagh's past

Historical Caucasian Albania was largely situated within the borders of the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan, also including southern Daghestan and the easternmost Georgia. Its inhabitants spoke languages affiliated with the Nakh-Daghestani (Northeastern Caucasian) sub-family of languages, and were represented in a loose alliance of 26 tribes. Initially, they were ruled by their own chiefs, but in the 1st century B.C., they were united under a single king, who lived in Kabala, on the left bank of the Kura River. While they had some political autonomy, these tribes were never anything like a highly integrated people. Moreover, the Kura River served as the southwestern border of this early Albanian Kingdom, and all the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers were included in the Armenian Kingdom until the turn of the 5th century, although numerous Albanian tribes continued to live there as well. In the early centuries A.D., both kingdoms were ruled by the Arsacid Dynasty that was introduced there by Persia. In A.D. 387-428, after Armenia had been partitioned between the Roman Empire and Sussanian Persia, Artsakh and Utik (i.e. the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers) lost their administrative connections with Armenia and were included in a newly established Persian province (*Marzpanate*) under the name of Caucasian Albania ("*Agvank*" in Armenian, and "*Arran*" in Arabic). By a new administrative arrangement, at the beginning of the 6th century the center of the latter was moved to the city of Partav situated on the right bank of the Kura River. In the meantime, the left bank of the Kura River gradually lost the name of Albania.

In those days, the population of the territory between the Kura and Arax Rivers consisted chiefly of Albanians, Armenians and Armenized Albanians. The language a majority of the local residents spoke is still a controversial matter. Although

Armenian scholars argue that Armenian was widespread there, certain other researchers believe that the Agvank people spoke their own Caucasian tongue (for example, see Thomson 1997: 230). Over time Christianity, which was introduced there in the 4th century A.D., came to divide the Albanians. The Albanian catholicoi were subordinated to the Armenian Church, which was monophysite. In A.D. 527, the famous Council of Dvin was held. There the Armenian, Albanian and Iberian clergy openly opposed the dyophysite line of Byzantine Orthodoxy (Chalcedonism) and broke away from the Byzantine Church. Yet, in the 7th – 8th centuries, the Albanian patriarchs made several attempts to break away from the Armenian Church and to return to the Byzantine one. The result was that the left bank Albanians were increasingly isolated from their compatriots on the right bank of the Kura River. The right side of the Kura River was strongly affected by Armenian culture for a long time, because of the incorporation of Artsakh and Utik into the Armenian state between the 2nd century B.C. and A.D. 428. That is why Armenian elements predominated in the culture of the right bank of the Kura River. After the Armenian alphabet was invented by Mesrob Mashtots and the monophysite tradition was adopted, the Armenian literary language enjoyed dominance because it was extensively used by the Church and state. In the 5th – 6th centuries, the left bank Albanians also had a writing system and, probably, some literature, but they lost them during the period of Arab rule. Almost nothing survived of this part of the Albanian cultural heritage except a few inscriptions from Mingechar, and there is no reason to consider right side Armenian literature to be translations from the Albanian language.

A substantial part of the Albanian population converted into Islam under Arab rule, and started using the Arabic script. Later on, in the 11th – 13th centuries they were Turkified, and became the founding group of the Azeri people. At the same time, the westernmost Albanians were Georgianized and became the core population of the historical province of Ereti. The Albanians on the right side of the Kura River, who were loyal to the monophysite faith and shifted to the Armenian language in early medieval times, merged with the Armenians and took their place among the ancestors of the Nagorny Karabagh Armenians. In the 7th – 9th centuries, Karabagh was ruled by the Mikhranid Dynasty, which was of the Persian origin, and was rapidly Armenized. After the death of the last dynastic ruler in A.D. 821, power was taken over by the old Armenian Dynasty of Aranshakhik; their sovereignty was limited to the highlands, and the lowlands stayed in Arab hands (Yeremian 1958a, 1958b; Novosel'tsev 1991: 190-191, 197; Hewsen 1982: 33-34; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 51-108).

By the end of the 9th century, the Arab Caliphate became weak and began losing its position in Transcaucasia. At that time, local Muslim emirates formed in southeast Transcaucasia – the Derbent, Shirvan and Ganja. The Armenian Kingdom of the Bagratids emerged to the west. The internal situation in the Bagratid Kingdom was not without tensions. The centralized policy of the kings was opposed by the Artsakh elite, who attempted to secure their autonomy and, in order

to legitimize it, emphasized their Albanian authenticity. The Khachen Principality especially used this strategy. In the late 9th century, Grigor-Khamam Arevelkatsi, of Aranshakhik origin, subordinated the lion's share of former Albania, including the left bank region of Kambisena, and declared himself the "Prince of Siunik and Albania". Later on, his sons divided this vast territory among themselves, but they were not able to hold on to its former autonomy, and in the 10th century became vassals of the Armenian Bagratids. Yet, the latter themselves enjoyed independence for only a brief period. In 1045, their capital, Ani, was taken by Byzantium, and Armenia finally lost its integrity. Political anarchy made it weak, and in less than half a century it was easily captured by the Seljuqs.

Since that time, the name "Albania" enjoyed mainly geographical and theological importance. Armenian authors used the name to designate the Christian population of former Albania. In particular, the east Transcaucasian patriarchs, who resided in the Gandzasar Monastery, had the title of the "Albanian catholicos" and held it up to the early 19th century.

In the late 12th century, Armenian-Georgian troops dealt a heavy blow to the Seljuqs, and the Khachen Principality, ruled by the Armenian Dynasty, was restored in Nagorny Karabagh, although its rulers were vassals of the Georgian kings. Hasan Jalal (1214-1261) was the most famous of these. He managed to get on with the Mongols and thus to secure his power and rescue Karabagh from devastation. He built several monasteries, including the Gandzasar, and his name is commemorated by numerous Armenian inscriptions from the 13th century. Being found guilty by the Mongols, Hasan Jalal died in jail, but his descendants secured some rights of possession in Khachen in the 14th – 15th centuries. In 1386-1405, Transcaucasia was devastated by Timur, after which northern Iran and Armenia fell into the hands of the Turkmen Dynasty of Kara Kojunlu in the early 15th century and of Ak Kojunlu in the late 15th century. The Hasan Jalal Dynasty survived, and his descendants enjoyed the titles of meliqs in a few small principalities of Nagorny Karabagh into the 16th – 18th centuries. Particularly important, they secured control over one of the most sacred Armenian places, the Gandzasar Monastery, and this gave them special weight.

Under the Safavi Dynasty, Karabagh was one of the provinces where the lowlands and hilly flanks belonged to the Muslim Khans, and the highlands were still controlled by the Armenian rulers. The system of meliq rule was finally developed in Nagorny Karabagh during the era of Shah-Abbas' (1578-1623) reign in Persia. At that time, the Persian authorities, on the one hand, encouraged the Armenian meliqs to act against the Ottoman Empire, and on the other hand, tried to weaken them through the isolation of the major Armenian-populated territories. To accomplish that, the Kurdish tribes were resettled in the area between Artsakh and Siunik. Nonetheless, the five Armenian polities of Karabagh constituted a strong alliance in the 17th – 18th centuries, and had to be reckoned with by their powerful neighbors. These highland areas made up an important center, where the idea of Armenian cultural revival and the establishment of an independent Armenian state

emerged. Unfortunately, the struggle for power in one of those polities caused internecine strife that was used to their advantage by the Turkic nomadic tribe of Saryjaly. In the mid-18th century, for the first time during its long history, Karabagh became familiar with the rule of the Turkic khan (Ioannisian 1947: 16-17; Ulubabian 1972, 1975, 1989). At that time, the Shusha-Karabagh Khanate emerged, and the Karabagh plateau became part of the system of Turkic transhumance pastoralism.

In these circumstances, the only strategy left to the Armenian meliqs was an alliance with the Russian Empire, which was already interested in annexing Transcaucasia. In particular, the highest Russian officials advised Catherine II to establish an Armenian Kingdom centered in Karabagh under Russian protection. On his side, the Karabagh khan, Ibrahim, began to take preventive measures – killing meliqs or putting them in jail, devastating the country, and the like. By the end of the 18th century, this resulted in mass flight by the Armenians and the depopulation of Karabagh.

Thus, in the late 18th century, the composition of the population of Karabagh had changed drastically. In the mid-18th century, the Muslim (Kurd) and Turkic tribes that had lived on the outskirts of Karabagh since the 11th – 12th centuries gained access to the highland territories and began to settle in Shusha. At the same time, i.e. by the end of the 18th century, a substantial number of its former Armenian inhabitants had left Nagorny Karabagh. Just at the turn of the 19th century, the Turkic population significantly outnumbered the local Armenians, but this only lasted for a short period. Toward the end of the 1820s, the Armenians began to come back to Karabagh, and they accounted for the majority of its population by the mid-19th century (Akopian 1968; Ulubabian 1989; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 51-108).

After the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was declared, in May 1918, the Armenian community of Karabagh discussed the matter at its Congresses in August and September that year. Initially they accepted Azerbaijan authority. However, in the fall, they offered strong resistance to the Turkish troops. Gaining no victory, the Turkish army left the region in November 1918. Then, being dissatisfied with the rule of the newly appointed Governor-General, Kh. Beg Sultanov, the Karabagh residents refused to obey Baku rule. Only in August 1919, being supported by Great Britain, did Azerbaijan manage to sign a treaty with Karabagh for the latter's incorporation into Azerbaijan. Yet, in order to enjoy real political control over the region, Azerbaijan had to use military force, and in March 1920 Karabagh's capital, Shusha, suffered brutal plunder and destruction. All the same, Azerbaijan rule did not last long. In April-May 1920, Azerbaijan was occupied by the Red Army, which in November entered Armenia. Resistance was much stronger in Zangezur and Karabagh, whose defense was organized by the Dashnak General, Garegin Njde, who attempted to establish the "Independent Republic of Highland Armenia". However, he also failed, for the Red Army took the region in July 1920. In May-July 1921, the issue of Karabagh was discussed at various bureaucratic levels,

where opposite decisions were made. This was obvious evidence of serious disagreement among the Bolshevik leaders. Ultimately, on July 5, 1921, it was decided that Karabagh must become a part of Azerbaijan. Two years later, Karabagh was granted autonomous status. The Kurdish ethnic region was organized to the south, in the Lachin corridor that had been abolished in 1929. In the 1930s, many Kurds were forcibly deported to Kazakhstan and Turkmenia (for details, see Sarkisyan 1975: 224; Mikaelian, Khurshudian 1988: 47-54; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 115-141).

The Albanization of the Armenian heritage

Karabagh played a crucial role in the Armenian-Azeri discourse of regional history. As we already know, the views of historians were becoming more radical during the 1960s – 1980s. Yet, the struggle between Armenian and Azeri scholars for Nagorny Karabagh started earlier. It was rooted in the 1950s, when the discovery of Albanian inscriptions by Azeri archaeologists in early medieval Mingechaur led to expectations of the discovery of an Albanian literature in the near future. Z. I. Yampol'sky was among the first to begin to talk about that. He emphasized the political independence of Artsakh in the early 7th century after the Sasanian governor was dislodged, the independent status of the Albanian Church (which was at odds with the Armenian Church), and argued that in this particular environment the Albanians must have written in their own language. He also put forward the far-reaching but highly dubious hypothesis that the only Albanian written document surviving to the present day, the “History of Agvans” of Movses Kagankatvatsi, was originally completed in the Albanian (Gargar) language, and later translated into Grabar (Yampol'sky 1957b).

After that time, Azeri historians paid a lot of attention to the manuscript of Movses Kagankatvatsi. Some of them began to compare different copies in order to find missing pages and a more authentic text (Buniatov 1961, 1965b). Others occupied themselves with the search for Albanian loan words (Gukasian 1968a)⁴⁷ and Turkic borrowings (Gukasian 1968b: 119) in this manuscript. Still others began to deny the evident borrowings in it from earlier Armenian manuscripts (Yampol'sky 1957b: 151; Buniatov 1965a: 27-28). However, the favorite occupation of the Azeri authors was the renaming of the medieval Armenian politicians, historians and writers who lived and worked in Karabagh, converting them into Albanians. Thus, over time Movses Kagankatvatsi, who wrote in Armenian, became the Albanian historian Moses of Kalankatui, as though his manuscript had been translated into Grabar later on (Yampol'sky 1957b: 151; Guseinov 1958: 75; K. Aliev 1962: 17; Gukasian 1968a). The same was the fate of the Armenian Prince, Sahl ibn-Sumbat (Armenians prefer to call him Sahl Smbatian), who was turned into either an Albanian or even an Azeri prince (Buniatov 1961: 9, 1965a: 12, 184-186)⁴⁸.

A book by Buniatov, published in 1965, became a most influential academic

work. It advocated all of these ideas as the basis for a new scholarly strategy. The book was focused on the history of Caucasian Albania during the Arab period, but the country was called Azerbaijan by the author. The latter wrote of “the Armenian-speaking authors” by whom he meant the early medieval intellectuals of Caucasian Albania who composed their manuscripts in Armenian, such as the historians Movses Kagankatvatsi and Kirakos Gandzaketsi, the poet Davtak, and the lawyer Mkhitar Gosh (Buniatov 1965a: 6, 57, 97-99. Also see Gukasian 1968b: 134; Ismailov 1969; Buniatov 1978: 55, 194). At the same time, Armenians considered these cultural activists to be some of the founders of the Armenian literary tradition (Abegian 1948: 310-314, 390-391). They could not help being indignant at what they saw as the appropriation of Armenian cultural figures (for example, see Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 181-183; Mnatsakanian 1969: 126-134; Melik-Oganjanian 1968: 173-188, 1969: 196-197; Ulubabian 1970: 163; Ganalanian et al. 1978: 100; Arutiunian 1987: 37; Svazian 1989a: 51-52; 1991: 9-10).

Meanwhile, Buniatov wrote of a supposedly extensive literature in Albanian, as if it did not survive only because the Arabs and Armenians intentionally destroyed it. He did his best to demonstrate that, before they had destroyed them, the Armenians translated the Albanian manuscripts into Grabar, intentionally distorting the original Albanian texts (Buniatov 1965a: 55-57, 97). Buniatov placed special emphasis on the intrigues of the Armenian catholicoi, as though they made every effort to impose the monophysite faith upon the Albanians and were supported by the Arabs, who approved any anti-Byzantine actions (Buniatov 1965a: 29, 92-96, 1965b: 67). Since that time, this idea became a common one among Azeri historians (Gukasian 1968b: 131; Geiushev 1984: 54-56; Geiushev, Akhadov 1991: 83). Yet, the Armenian scholars responded, the question was not of any ethnic conflict, but of a religious struggle by the monophysites against Chalcedonism. The latter was supported by Byzantium, which attempted to pressure both Armenia and Agvank; and in this struggle the Armenian and the Agvank Churches were allies (Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 178-180; Mnatsakanian 1969: 125-126; Svazian 1989a: 55). The Armenian critics noted that, while constructing the fantastic picture of the destruction of the Albanian literature by the Armenians, Buniatov avoided mentioning real facts like the brutal destruction of Armenian manuscripts by the Seljuq Turks (Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 187).

From the late 1950s, Azeri historians did their best to isolate the early medieval population of Karabagh from the Armenians. They not only stressed its close linguistic connection with the Daghestani highlanders (Yusifov 1961), which was certainly true, but also made every effort to prove that the Christian Albanians spoke Turkic (Gukasian 1968b: 121), or invented a distinct Siunik language or a special Siunik dialect of Albanian (Buniatov 1965a: 100, note 129; Gukasian 1968b: 132; Ismailov 1969; Neimatova 1985: 87; Mamedova 1986: 106). In response, the Armenian authors pointed out that the peripheral vernaculars of Artsakh and Siunik were only local dialects of Armenian (Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 185-186; Mnatsakanian 1969: 35, 136-137; Ulubabian 1968, 1988: 86;

Arutiunian 1987: 51-52; Svazian 1987: 44-45; 1989b: 12; Mikaelian, Khurshudian 1988: 46).

Buniatov used another approach as well. First, he dated the Armenization of Karabagh to almost the 12th century (Buniatov 1965a: 93), which was much later than it really had been. Second, following a strategy already established in Azerbaijan, he emphasized cultural traditions rather than language, and claimed that Artsakh had never been the center of Armenian culture (Buniatov 1965a: 100-101). Some of his colleagues went even further, and insisted that the local inhabitants maintained their original identity, distinct from Armenian, until the 18th – 19th centuries (Yampol'sky 1957b: 153; Gukasian 1968b: 133; Akhundov, Akhundov 1986: 107; Ismailov 1989c).

It had already become clear in the 1960s that grave territorial issues were the background for all these scholarly disputes. Buniatov openly argued that “Arran has never been part of Armenia, either ethnically or politically”. He also argued that the Albanian catholicos consistently resisted their temporary dependence on the Armenian Church (Buniatov 1965a: 48-49, 93-94). Gukasian also refused to believe that Artsakh had ever been included in the Armenian Kingdom and insisted that, until A.D. 704, the Albanian Church retained its independence from the Armenian patriarchs (Gukasian 1968b: 122-130). Ismailov treated the Armenian view of ancient and early medieval history as the expression of Armenian claims for the territories on the right bank of the Kura River (Ismailov 1969: 125-126). While emphatically rejecting these claims, Ismailov maintained that Albania was an independent state, and the Albanians were among the ancestors of the Azeri people. He complained bitterly that the Karabagh Albanians were “Armenized after the Arab conquest” but, in his view, this did not provide any basis for the Armenians to talk of the annexation of Karabagh (Ismailov 1989d: 65).

Later on, Buniatov did his best to cleanse other lands of contemporary Azerbaijan as well of Armenian history. For example, he put forward his own version of the location of historical Nakhjivan where, according to a medieval chronicle, the Arabs had mercilessly executed captured Armenian princes. Whereas all his predecessors identified this Nakhjivan with the capital of the contemporary Nakhjivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan, Buniatov argued that it should be searched for much further west, in the Kars region of Turkey (Buniatov 1977a; 1978: 195-196. Also see Velikhanova 1987: 55-56). Like many of his colleagues, he insisted that the right bank of the Kura River was, but for brief periods, an integral part of Caucasian Albania rather than Armenia (Buniatov 1977b). In order to prove that, he changed the idea of the location of early Shaki – the place of residence of Sahl ibn-Sumbat. In contrast to other researchers, who identified Shaki with contemporary Nukha on the left bank of the Kura River, Buniatov argued that another Shaki was mentioned by a medieval chronicler – the village of Shaki (Shake) situated next to the Arax River in the contemporary Sisian region of Armenia (Buniatov 1957, 1965: 187-188, 1987c). Yet, all historical sources agree that Shaki was situated on the left bank of the Kura River, whereas the village of

Shake emerged in Sisian only in the late medieval period. Thus, while presenting Sahl ibn-Sumbat as the “Albanian Prince” and moving his lands far to the south, Buniiatov attempted to confirm the idea that the southern borders of Caucasian Albania reached the Arax River and Lake Sevan. That is how Armenian scholars interpreted his view (Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 184-186; Smbatian 1989: 9-11). In the meantime, Buniiatov’s approach was appreciated by a Georgian author, who used it to distinguish between “southern Shaki”, the estate of the Armenian Prince, and “northern Shaki”, which was identified with the “Kingdom of Ereti” and was a Georgian polity (Muskhelishvili 1982: 35-38, 80, note 171).

At the same time, Buniiatov did his best to revise the history of Armenia. He maintained that, from the time of Tigran the Great, the Armenians had been permanently denied political and economic independence, and he derided the aspirations of Armenian historians to claim that the Bagratid Kingdom was an independent state (Buniiatov 1977b; Buniiatov, Neimatova 1988: 106). Naturally, Armenian historians could not help viewing this as a “distortion of the Armenian people’s history” and discovered an alarming move by Azeri scholars toward the anti-Armenian traditions of Turkish historians (Galanian et al. 1978: 97-98; Arutiunian 1987: 55; Svazian 1989a: 53). It is worth noting that Buniiatov began to advocate this approach especially actively after a Session of the NKAR branch of CPA, held in March 1975, that will be discussed further on.

Simultaneously, Azeri historians made great efforts to prove that it was incorrect to treat Caucasian Albania as a backward periphery of the Near Eastern civilizations and that in terms of its economy and political structure it was by no means less advanced than its neighbors (Aliev 1974; Aliev 1975; Akhundov, Akhundov 1983: 1; Khalilov 1985a). In the 1960s – 1970s, Azeri authors gradually began to push the roots of the Caucasian Albanian state back into the past in order to make it contemporaneous with the Iberian Kingdom. In contrast to Strabo, who dated the emergence of the Kingdom of Caucasian Albania to the 1st century B.C., they moved this date to the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. (Babaev 1976: 48-49, 1990: 6, 46-49; Geiushev 1984: 3; Khalilov 1985a; Mamedova 1986: 57, 1989a: 108; Akhundov 1986: 6; Gajiev 1994). They based the earlier date on references to discoveries of coin caches in the territory of Caucasian Albania. At the same time, the earliest coins from the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. were the obvious result of importation; and local imitations began to appear only during the end of the 3rd century B.C. (Khalilov 1985a: 152-155). It is still unclear where the latter were minted. That is why none of this can be viewed as indubitable evidence of the earlier emergence of a state in Caucasian Albania, which also contradicts historical data (Akopian 1987: 17-18; Svazian 1991: 21-22). While referring to the archaeological data, Azeri authors insisted that cities and an urbanized culture had developed in the territory of Azerbaijan by the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. (Babaev 1990: 51-61). However, neither temples nor palaces were found there.

There were also attempts to date the arrival of Christianity in Caucasian Albania to an earlier time. With reference to the rather dubious evidence of Movses

Kagankatvatsi, Azeri scholars argued that Albania was the first Christian land in Transcaucasia and that the Albanian Church was of an apostolic nature (Geiushev 1984: 25-27; Akhundov, Akhundov 1986: 107-109)⁴⁹. Having carried out an analysis of medieval Albanian Church history, R. B. Geiushev did his best to isolate it from its Armenian roots, and intentionally omitted everything that concerned its long subordination to the Armenian Church. He recalled the latter only in respect to its active struggle against Chalcedonism, which strengthened its position in Albania in the 7th century (Geiushev 1984: 76-79). Thus, following Buniatov, he depicted the Armenian Church as an absolutely evil agent that persistently oppressed freethinking in Albania. True, Geiushev recognized that there were numerous Armenian inscriptions on early medieval monuments, but he called them Albanian rather than Armenian.

Yet, Geiushev acknowledged that the Albanian Church had been subordinate to the Armenian Church since the 8th century (Geiushev 1984: 79), although, in fact, it was dependent on the latter from the very beginning – that situation was even strengthened after the center of the Albanian Church was removed to the right bank of the Kura River (Akopian 1987: 136-142). In the meantime, some Azeri authors went even further and argued that the Armenization of the Albanian Church took place no earlier than the mid-17th century. Moreover, they maintained that the producers of the Armenian inscriptions at the local medieval monasteries had nothing to do with the Armenians. Contrary to well-established knowledge, they made strenuous efforts to convince the reader that most of those inscriptions were of a secondary nature and that they were carved over destroyed Albanian ones (Akhundov, Akhundov 1986: 111-112). In this way, medieval Armenian churches gradually began to turn into “Albanian” ones, under the pens of Azeri authors. This trend developed to the extent that even quite characteristic Armenian inscriptions were sometimes interpreted as “Albanian” (for that, see Karagezian 1987; Svazian 1987; Akopian 1987: 138-139, note 62).

At the same time, many Azeri authors used to discuss the issue in the following way. If the right bank of the Kura River belonged to Caucasian Albania and had nothing to do with the Armenians, there should be no traces of Armenians there, and all the historical monuments must have been constructed by Albanians. Initially, this task was fulfilled just by omissions that were already being practiced as early as the 1950s. For example, a tourist guide entitled “Monuments of the history of Azerbaijan” was published by the Museum of History of Azerbaijan in 1956. Not a single word was said there about Armenian cultural monuments. Only one of the numerous early medieval monasteries situated in Azerbaijan was mentioned – a Kyzylvank monastery situated near Nakhjivan. The only monument of Nagorny Karabagh that found room in the guide was the fortress of Djraberd (Kaziev 1956: 41). The relationship of these monuments to the Armenians was out of bounds. At the same time, Kyzylvank (Karmir Vank, which means “Red monastery” in Armenian) is the only early Armenian monastery that survived in the city of Astapat to the present day. This architectural assemblage, dating back to the

7th century and known to the Armenians as the Monastery of St. Stepanos, is considered an “outstanding monument of Armenian medieval architecture” (Aivazian 1981: 108-109). As to the fortress of Djraberd, its very name has a good Armenian etymology: “*djur*” means “water”, and “*berd*” – “fortress”. In the 17th – 18th centuries, the fortress was the residence of the Armenian meliqs of Israelian. The guide did not inform tourists in any way that there was an Armenian monastery of the 16th – 17th centuries called Yerek Manukian next to this fortress, where the Armenian khachkars survived (Mkrtchian 1988: 52-55; Ulubabian 1989).

In a new revised and enlarged edition of the guide, the authors did not fail to mention the ruins of a Zoroastrian shrine in Baku, but they still kept silence about the Armenians and their cultural heritage. The early traces of writing were mentioned only in respect to excavations in Mingechaur where a few very fragmentary Albanian inscriptions had been discovered – only nine of them were actually found, contrary to earlier reports in which Armenian, Georgian and Greek inscriptions were erroneously included in the list of Albanian ones (Akopian 1987: 138, note 62). Yet, the numerous extant Armenian inscriptions were beyond the authors’ interest. Now, Kyzylvank was openly called an Albanian monastery, whereas Armenian churches and graveyards were entirely ignored (Kaziev 1960). At the same time, there were no less than 60 Armenian monasteries and 500 churches in Nagorny Karabagh including the famous Gandzasar monastery of the 13th century, which is highly respected by the Armenians as the “most gorgeous of all the rich architectural heritage of the Armenian people”. The guide kept silence of the numerous khachkars of the 10th – 13th centuries widely dispersed throughout the territory of Nagorny Karabagh and well known in other southern areas of Azerbaijan (Mkrtchian 1988: 14-19).

The Museum of the History of Azerbaijan followed this strategy for decades. The Museum itself was called a storehouse of “invaluable treasures of the intellectual and material heritage of the Azeri people” in its jubilee publication. The inhabitants of Azerbaijan, who had lived there since the prehistoric times, were called the “Azeris (*azerbajantsy*)” without any reservation. The Museum proudly displayed the early medieval inscription from Mingechaur, but failed to mention dozens and even hundreds of Armenian inscriptions found on the right bank of the Kura River (Azizbekova 1973). Nothing was said of any other ethnic groups living in the territory of Azerbaijan, as well as of that in the 1920s the museum was called the Museum of the History of the Peoples of Azerbaijan. In October 1983, the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR decreed the preparation and publication of a “Collection of monuments of the history and culture of Azerbaijan”. The best Azeri specialists were hired for the project. Yet, only the historical and cultural heritage of the Azeri people was at the agenda (Abasov 1989). Armenian monuments were regularly omitted in the publications on the history of art and architecture in Azerbaijan. Moreover, gradually even Caucasian Albania was omitted; it was replaced by the Azeris and their “ancestors” (for example, see Salamzade, Mamedzade 1985; Efendi 1986). The magnificent

publication, focused on the architectural monuments of Azerbaijan, covered only Muslim constructions; earlier Christian churches were not mentioned at all in the territory of Azerbaijan (Salamzade, Mamedzade 1985). In 1980, that map that had been completed by the Azeri authors showing the architectural monuments in the territory of the Azerbaijan SSR was issued in Moscow. It recorded 101 monuments. Only two of them were early Christian churches and both of these were situated in the northwest corner of Azerbaijan, close to the Georgian border. No Christian monuments at all were registered in the territory between the Kura and Arax Rivers; even the Gandzasar monastery was missing. In brief, historical Azerbaijan was displayed as a purely Muslim country; the memory of the Armenians and even of Christianity, once dominant there, was consistently erased (Karta 1980). Moreover, all of this was done despite the long efforts of Azeri specialists in Caucasian Albanian studies to ascribe Christian Albanian ancestors to the Azeris!

The republication of classical and medieval sources with omissions, with the replacement of the term “Armenian state” by “Albanian state” and with other distortions of the original manuscripts was another way to play down the Armenian role in early and medieval Transcaucasia. In the 1960s – 1990s, numerous republications of this sort came out in Baku, on the initiative of the Academician Buniatov (for that, see Sarkisian, Muradian 1988: 47; Muradian 1988; 1990: 100-145; Agaian et al. 1989; Bournoutian 1992, 1992-1993). Recently, while discussing ethnic processes and their role in the history of Azerbaijan, some Azeri authors have completely avoided the issue of the formation of either the Azeri language or the Azeri people, as though they had been present there from time immemorial (for example, see Mamedov 2000: 29).

The Azeri scholars did all of this by order of the Soviet and Party authorities of Azerbaijan, rather than through free will. The Session of the NKAR Regional Branch of the CPA, held in March 1975, played an especially negative role in this development. This session was arranged in response to the growing Armenian nationalist movement, and focused on patriotic education and withstanding nationalism (Musliumov et al. 1983: 67-68)⁵⁰. Armenian nationalism was the target, and the intervention of the Azerbaijan authorities in both the intellectual and cultural life of the Armenians of Nagorny Karabagh increased drastically after the session in question. Since that time, the indigenous population of the region was called “Azeri” in all reference books, and cultural relationships with the Armenian SSR, including receiving broadcasts over the air, were broken off. Only those views of history became officially acceptable that met the demands of the “Azeri idea”. The jubilee volume devoted to the 50th anniversary of the NKAR was withdrawn from circulation and burnt just because it told of the long struggle of the Nagorny Karabagh people for independence and Armenian architectural and archaeological sites were enumerated (for that, see Mirzoian 1989). A statistical volume was published, instead, where it was maintained that the true history of Nagorny Karabagh began only with the establishment of the Soviet power in Azerbaijan (Astsaturian 1974: 3).

The latter idea seemed like an instruction for the new jubilee volume to be published for the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the NKAR. Its authors paid less attention to the early and medieval periods; they noted that there were numerous historical monuments in the region, but failed to mention that the medieval monuments had been built by the ancestors of the local Armenians. Instead, a Palaeolithic cave of Azykh was glorified as the site where, in the 1970s, the mandible of the earliest human had been discovered in the territory of the USSR (Musliumov et al. 1983: 112). All of this was in sharp contrast to the book devoted to the 60th anniversary of the Nakhjivan ASSR and published in the same year. In that book, early and medieval history, including the “Azeri ancestors” were generously discussed, in great detail! The message was evidently that, in contrast to Karabagh, Nakhjivan experienced periods of prosperity long before Soviet power was established (Guliev et al. 1984: 8-19). Needless to say, Armenian history in Nakhjivan and its rich architectural heritage were entirely ignored. This was a lesson that had to be borne in mind by all Azeri historians.

Buniatov even called medieval Nakhjivan an Azeri city. His only reason for doing that was that the Atabegs had resided there from time to time during the course of the 12th century. True, he remarked that the city was situated in a borderland that could not avoid being affected by “Christian foreigners”. It was out of the question that the latter were of Armenian origin (Buniatov 1978: 39, 181-185, 192-195. Also see Mamedov 1977). It is also instructive that his book was supplemented by a map on which Nakhjivan could be found, but it was in the center of medieval Azerbaijan (Buniatov 1978: fig. 3). In the very late 1980s, when Armenian-Azeri tensions were growing very fast, all sorts of similar arguments were widely disseminated by the Azerbaijan mass media. They were manifested, in particular, in an article by Dj. Guliev, the Director of the Institute of Party History at the CC CPA, who maintained that the Azeris not only lived in the territory of Nakhjivan from the earliest days but also were always the dominant majority there (Guliev 1989). Another well-known Azeri historian, M. A. Ismailov, argued in a popular booklet aimed at “falsifiers of history”, that the “city of Nakhjivan had never been an Armenian city” (Ismailov 1989d: 6). At the same time, from the Armenian point of view, Nakhjivan was one of the earliest cities to play a significant role in their history (because of the conversion to Christianity and the beginning of a school system). Despite of all the destruction, the physical masterpieces of Armenian architecture and visual art still survive there (for example, see Aivazian 1981; Ulubabian 1979c; Khodzhabekian, Asatrian 1988: 18).

In the 1970s, the Azeri historians moved from a position of silence to the appropriation of the Armenian historical heritage. The medieval Principality of Khachen suddenly became an “Albanian” polity, and the Gandzasar Monastery was called a “monument of the culture and religion of Caucasian Albania” (Geiushev 1973a, 1973b). In 1986, a booklet was published in Baku in the popular series entitled “Monuments of the material culture of Azerbaijan”, which represented the Khachen Principality and the Gandzasar Monastery as evident historical heritages

of Caucasian Albania, only because the local catholicoi identified themselves with the distinctly Albanian Church (Geiushev 1986: 7-8; Geiushev, Akhadov 1991: 85. Also see Akhundov, Akhundov 1983: 9-10, 1986: 110; Akhundov 1986: 224-229). The authors of all these publications failed to note that the cathedral was a typical example of Armenian architecture of the 10th – 13th centuries, or that numerous Armenian inscriptions survived there⁵¹). They also failed to mention that the Albanian state had ceased to exist by the period in question, and that all the historical sources called the ruler of Khachen an Armenian Prince. Concerning the name, the “Albanian Church”, the specialists stated that it reflected a rather conservative Church tradition (Yakobson 1977, 1984: 146-147; Ulubabian 1981a, 1988: 86-87, 89).

All these arguments excited the imaginations of Azeri authors. In the 1980s, one of them, the architect, D. A. Akhundov, attempted to identify typical monuments of Armenian medieval art, the khachkars (cross-shaped stones), with “Albanian khachdashes”. He invested a lot of energy in attempting to prove that they were different in style from the Armenian ones. In his view, the monuments preserved traces of pre-Christian Mithraist or Zoroastrian symbols, and he “discovered” these traces in typical Christian effigies (Akhundov 1983, 1986: 109; Akhundov 1985, 1986: 236-252). As critics made clear, he was in fact either ignorant of or intentionally omitting well-known characteristics of Christian iconography, which he sacrificed to an “obsession with Mithraism”. As a result, he “revealed” the survival of the latter in typical symbolic representations of evangelists and guardians in the cathedrals (Yakobson 1984; Ulubabian 1988: 91). Moreover, also through ignorance or intention, Akhundov managed to miss the Armenian inscriptions that survived on almost all the “khachdashes” under discussion (for that, see Ulubabian 1988: 87-92).

Yet, Akhundov interpreted critical remarks by specialists as their intention to arrest Azeri studies of Caucasian Albania and block access to the local early Christian culture by Azeri scholars. At the same time, he himself, perhaps, because of naiveté, demonstrated the goals of these studies: he recognized that finding Armenian inscriptions on Christian churches hindered his studies because these findings supported the “opinion that they (the churches and “khachdashes”. V. Sh.) belonged to the Armenian Church”. He did his best to discredit these inscriptions as though they were fakes. In fact, he was one of those people who tried to force the Armenian cultural heritage out of Transcaucasia (Akhundov, Akhundov 1986: 104-105, 111-112). Simultaneously, in the 1980s, the Azeri authorities stopped giving permission to Armenian scholars to carry out studies in the territory of Azerbaijan. An attempt by the latter to arrange archaeological excavations in Nagorny Karabagh and help with the restoration of local monuments in 1989 was qualified by a well-known Azeri scholar as a “direct intervention into the internal matters of a sovereign republic – the Azerbaijan SSR” (Ismailov 1989d: 67).

Some other Azeri authors, while discussing early Christian monuments in Caucasian Albania, remained silent about Armenian architectural constructions,

khachkars and epigraphy (Rzaev 1976; Gajiev 1994). After that, the “Albanization” of prehistoric Azerbaijan began. It was known from historical sources that Iranian-speaking nomads infiltrated Caucasian Albania from the north in the last third of the 1st Millennium B.C., and scholars identified these migrations with the appearance of catacomb graves. The custom of artificially deforming skulls was traced there. This was characteristic of Sarmatian tribes (Aliev 1974: 182-192; Aliev 1975: 164-165; Babaev 1990: 115-117; Svazian 1991: 24-25). Some Azeri authors threw this conclusion into doubt. Despite the obvious Sarmatian character of these graves, they identify them as “Albanian” or even “Turkic” (Rzaev 1965: 87; Khalilov 1985a: 98-103). Moreover, the Azeri archaeologist, D. A. Khalilov, goes so far as to identify all the early local burials as Albanian, despite their evident high heterogeneity (Khalilov 1985b)⁵².

A new page in this hot discussion was opened by revisionists who argued that the east Transcaucasian population was Turkic-speaking from the very beginning. They called Karabagh the “homeland of our ancestors of Sumerian-Turkic origins”, identified the Turks with the Sakae, who gave the name Sakasene to the region on the right side of the Kura River, presented Atropatene as the “first center of the Scythian-Turkic tribes” and populated the Khachen Principality by Turks (Alibeizade, Veliev 1989: 58, 61). One of the biggest problems dealt with the cultural identity of numerous stone representations of rams and horses, which were dispersed throughout medieval graveyards between the Kura and Arax Rivers. Azeri scholars demonstrated a tendency to include them into the Turkic heritage and to interpret them as early Turkic totem symbols (Rzaev 1965: 85-86; Neimatova 1981, 1985: 87; Salamzade, Mamedzade 1985: 210; Efendi 1986; Buniiatov, Neimatova 1988: 110). This approach was first developed by the Azeri specialist in medieval history, S. B. Ashurbeili, who was indignant because a researcher from the State Hermitage (Leningrad), Ye. G. Pchelina had identified all this sort of stone sculpture as part of the Armenian cultural heritage (Ashurbeili 1956: 99). It is worth noting that, following Pchelina and Sysoev, Ashurbeili listed the areas where these monuments had been found. However, in contrast to her predecessors, she failed to mention that all of them were associated with Armenian graveyards situated near Armenian medieval churches (cf. Pchelina 1940). Needless to say, on their side Armenian researchers demonstrated the deep roots of the ram cult on the Armenian plateau and argued that the stone representations of rams were associated with Armenian cultural tradition (Aivazian 1981: 74-75; Sagumian 1988).

Scholarly discourse on the cultural identity of historical monuments gradually became of great practical importance. Each side began to accuse the other of the destruction of their own historical heritage (for example, see Buniiatov, Neimatova 1988: 105-106, 111-112, note 2; Buniiatov 1990a: 360; Khachatrian 1989: 161-162; Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 21-22; Khodjabekian, Asatrian 1988: 26-27; Dadamian 1989). Indeed, the destruction of historical monuments was a real problem. A “war of the graveyards” was already being waged, targeting historical memory, before true military actions commenced. As a result, the destruction of

gravestones turned into a real epidemic by the fall of 1989. An Armenian graveyard near Shusha was especially badly damaged: gravestones and khachkars there were overturned.

Sometimes the destruction of historical and religious monuments was substantiated and approved by local scholars. For example, the Church of Surb Yerrordutiun (St. Trinity), greatly venerated by the Armenians, was demolished in Nakhjivan in 1975 as a result of reconstructionist activities. This Church was known as the place where Armenian Princes had been burnt alive by the Arabs in 705 (Aivazian 1981: 106). Soon after the Church was pulled down, Buniiatov began to advocate the idea that the Armenian Princes were brought to destruction, not in Nakhjivan, which was situated at the Arax River, but far away from there, in northeastern Turkey. He advised the Armenians to look for their historical relics there (Buniiatov 1977a, 1978: 195-196). Of course, the Armenian scholars were indignant at that suggestion (for example, see Ganalanian et al. 1978: 98-99; Khodjabekian, Asatrian 1988: 26; Smbatian 1989: 7-9).

The problem of the ownership of early churches and monasteries became especially serious at the very end of the 1980s, during the course of the liberalization of state policy regarding religion. For example, in 1989, the Committee on Religious Affairs of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR made a decision to transfer the architectural assemblages of the Gandzasar and Amarsar monasteries to the Armenian Church. This aroused indignation in Azerbaijan, where the monasteries were viewed as an Albanian and hence an Azeri heritage. As a result, after protests by the Soviet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR, the Committee on Religious Affairs had to overturn its former decision, and both monasteries were returned to the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan (Geiushev, Akhadov 1991: 83).

All the passion of the 1960s – 1980s were caused by one crucial problem concerning the southern borders of Caucasian Albania, which had a lot to do with the territories being contested between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Buniiatov was the first to begin to argue openly that the territories between the Kura and Arax Rivers belonged to Caucasian Albania rather than to Armenia (Buniiatov 1965, 1977b). This idea began to be pursued by all Azeri historians (Gukasian 1968b: 122; Ismailov 1969) including those specializing in Caucasian Albania, who considered it their obligation to prove that the boundary between Caucasian Albania and Armenia had always or almost always coincided with the Arax River's bed rather than with that of the Kura (Aliev 1974: 108-123, 1987: 4).

The Albanian myth

Thus, the Azeri views of the early and medieval regional history were opposite to the Armenian ones. In 1986, the historian Farida D. Mamedova defended her Doctor of History thesis in Baku, which turned out to be a landmark in the escalation of tensions between the two historical schools. Mamedova began her

career with the study of various versions of the Movses Kagankatvatsi's manuscript. She carried out her Candidate in History project under the tutelage of the well-known Armenian historian, K. N. Yuzbashian. After the successful defense of her candidate thesis in 1971, she published her manuscript as a book in 1977. In the course of its preparation for publication, the manuscript was subjected to rather interesting changes. Whereas the thesis was focused on Movses Kagankatvatsi's manuscript (Mamedova 1971), the latter turned into the "Albanian historian" Moses of Kalankatui; and the already known to us interpretation, reading that the Albanian genuine text of the "History of Albanians" had been translated into Armenian, was reproduced (Mamedova 1977). At the same time, Mamedova ignored entirely that the "History of Albanians" borrowed a lot from earlier Armenian sources and that the "country of Agvank" of Movses Kagankatvatsi was different from the original Caucasian Albania⁵³). In brief, it is obvious that Mamedova's manuscript was highly affected by its editor, the Academician Buniyatov. Moreover, as one of the critics noted, evidently Mamedova did not read many of the historical sources and professional publications she was referring to, and her conclusions puzzled specialists (Ulubabian 1979)⁵⁴).

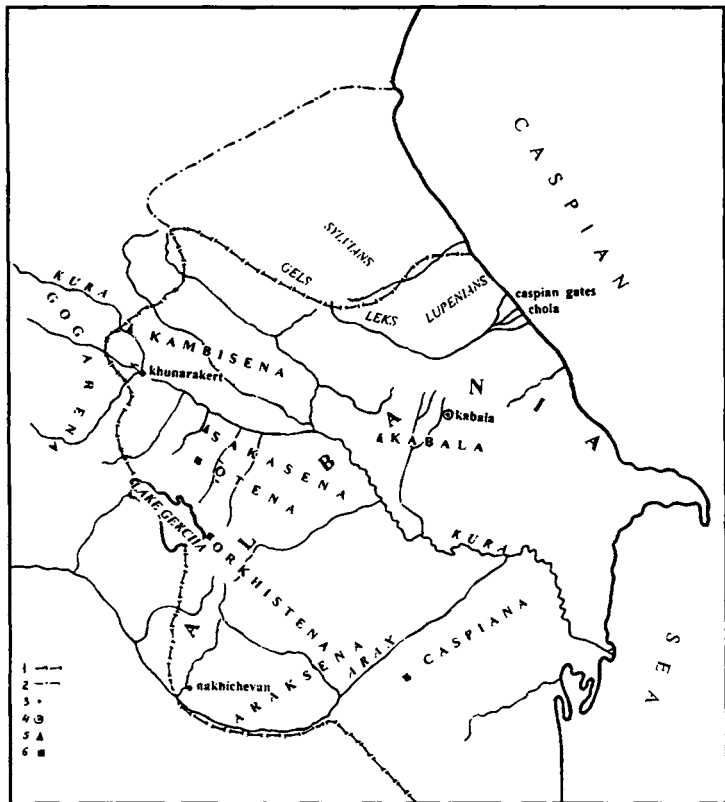
In the meantime, obviously following Buniyatov's advice, Mamedova chose for her Doctoral project the study of the most crucial issues at the core of the Azeri-Armenian dispute: "What were the political boundaries of the Albanian state in the classical and early medieval periods? In what territory did the formation of Albanian ethnic group – one of the ancestors of the Azeri people – take place? What kind of political life, ideology, and religion were pursued there?" (Mamedova 1986: 3). This thesis was a landmark in the long project of revising Albanian history and culture that had been carried out by many Azeri authors for decades. Mamedova was quite positive that Caucasian Albania's own literature had flourished in Albanian until the 10th century. She reproduced her counterparts' fantasies about the translation of the "History of the Albanians" into Armenian. Following Buniyatov, she listed Movses Kagankatvatsi, Mkhitar Gosh, and Kirakos Gandzakatsi among Albanian cultural figures (Mamedova 1986: 8, 21-32, 38-39). Moreover, she told of some unknown translations of theological literature from Greek and Syrian into Albanian and assumed that the original writing system had already been invented in Albania before the Christian era (Mamedova 1986: 5-7, 256, note 1). She also put into question the participation of Mesrob Mashtots in the invention of the Albanian alphabet – rather, she wrote of its "reformation" (Mamedova 1986: 6-7, 40). It goes without saying that she did not provide any historical evidence for any of that.

Mamedova identified the Khachen Principality, with all its rulers and architectural monuments, as the "Albanian historical heritage". Moreover, she insisted on the development of a distinct "Albanian ethnos" in the medieval period, and, in order to isolate it from the Armenians, claimed that the latter arrived in the territory of Azerbaijan only in the very late 18th – very early 19th centuries (Mamedova 1986: 18, 39-40).

Being aware that all this contradicted voluminous evidence from medieval Armenian authors, Mamedova accused them of a tendentious approach and the distortion of the true historical picture (Mamedova 1986: 41-47). True, one cannot but agree with her call for a critical approach regarding historical sources. Yet, the thoughtful reader would notice that in a surprising way this appeal avoided similarly treating those sources that corresponded to Mamedova's viewpoint. In particular, she cited whole pages of the "Albanian historian, Moses of Kalankatui" having entirely relied on him and making no attempt to compare his evidence with that of any other historical sources. She was especially suspicious of the Armenian historical tradition. Indeed, she had some reasons to accuse contemporary Armenian historians of romanticizing the early history of Armenia. At the same time, she herself labored to upgrade the prestige of Caucasian Albania: to push the date of its birth as far into the past as possible; to deliver it from any dependency on neighboring powerful states; to demonstrate the stability of its boundaries; to prove the very early arrival of Christianity there; and to provide the Albanian Church with independent status (Mamedova 1986: 55-84).

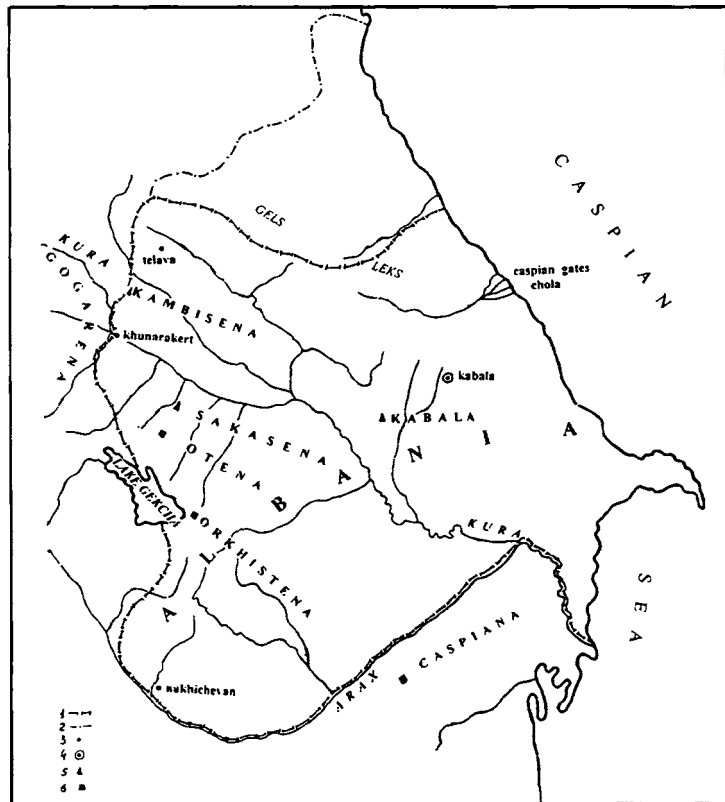
Mamedova's book was also an indicator that, following Armenian and Georgian researchers, Azeri scholars were ready to enter the ambiguous field of "historical geography" which, in the Soviet environment, was a screen for intense ideological struggle for territorial rights. Mamedova argued emphatically that the original territory of Caucasian Albania was by no means affected by historical disturbances, and that at all times it embraced all the territories on the right bank of the Kura River (maps 9-14). In fact, all lands were at stake where Albanian tribes had lived from the earliest days, but which were strongly affected by neighboring Armenian and Georgian cultures later on. The political status of all those lands was changing over time: sometimes they were part of Caucasian Albania, and belonged either to Armenia, or to Georgia, or to Azerbaijan in some other historical period (map 15). These lands included Kambisene, Gogarene (Gugark) and Ereti in the west⁵⁵, the right bank of the Kura River (Utik, Artsakh) in the southwest, and Siunik and Paytakaran in the south (Mamedova 1986: 93-144, 1987). Following Buniatov, Mamedova argued that the Armenization of the Artsakh Albanians was a long continuous process: initially they were affected by the Armenian Church ("Gregorianization"), and only in the 10th century did they begin to shift to speaking Armenian and leaning on Armenian culture, which completed their Armenization (Mamedova 1986: 105).

Mamedova's approach towards the historical process in Nakhjivan, situated in the territory of historical Armenia, was the same. She maintained that Armenization also started there only in the 10th century, that some Albanian writing system had been used there until the 12th century (there is still no evidence for that! V. Sh.), that "Armenized Albanians" rather than Armenians lived there, and that it was they who left the outstanding pieces of architecture there that are quite erroneously considered their own by the Armenians (Mamedova 1986: 115). While arguing these points, she disregarded all witness by Armenian medieval sources and refused



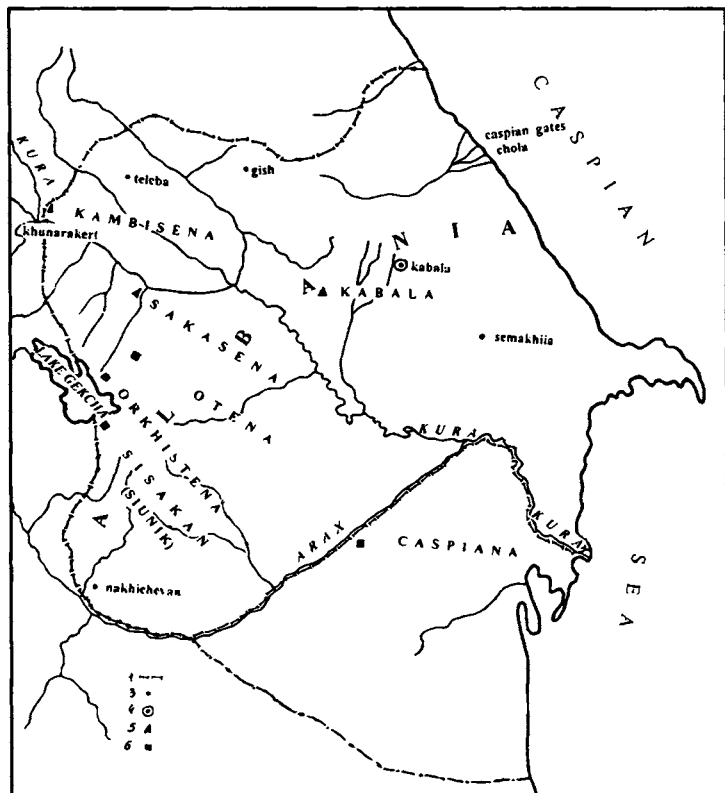
Map 9 Albania in the 3rd century B.C.
(after Mamedova 1986)

1 – borders; 2 – area of influence; 3 – city;
4 – capital; 5 – districts; 6 – provinces



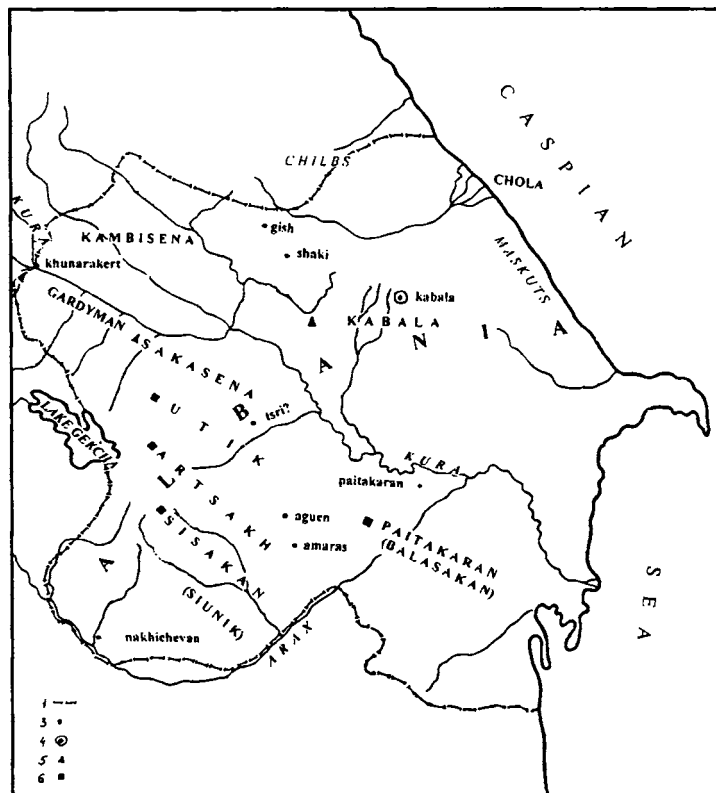
Map 10 Albania in the 2nd – 1st centuries B.C.
(after Mamedova 1986)

1 – borders; 2 – area of influence; 3 – city;
4 – capital; 5 – districts; 6 – provinces



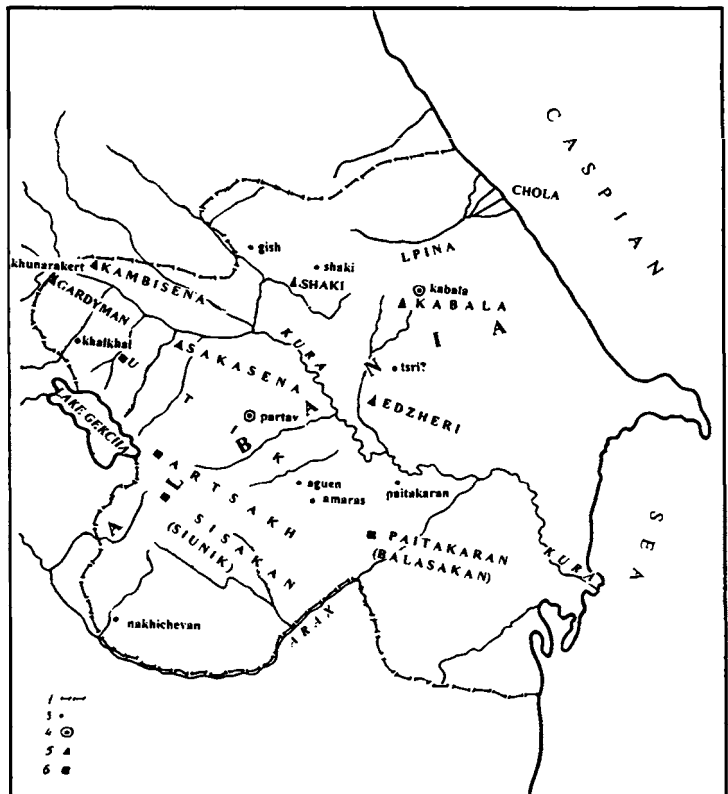
Map 11 Albania in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D.
(after Mamedova 1986)

1 – borders; 2 – area of influence; 3 – city;
4 – capital; 5 – districts; 6 – provinces



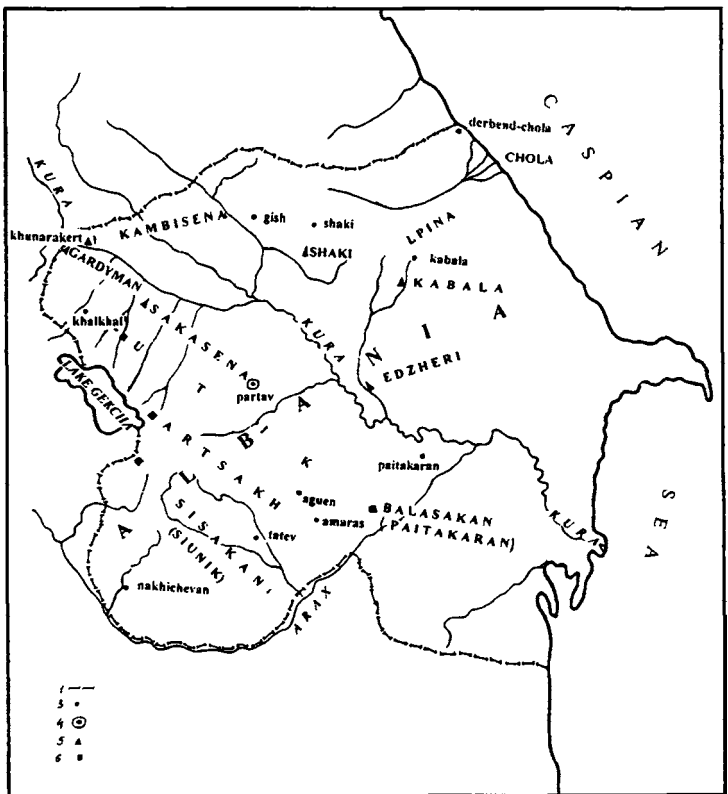
Map 12 Albania in the 3rd – 4th centuries A.D.
(after Mamedova 1986)

1 – borders; 2 – area of influence; 3 – city;
4 – capital; 5 – districts; 6 – provinces



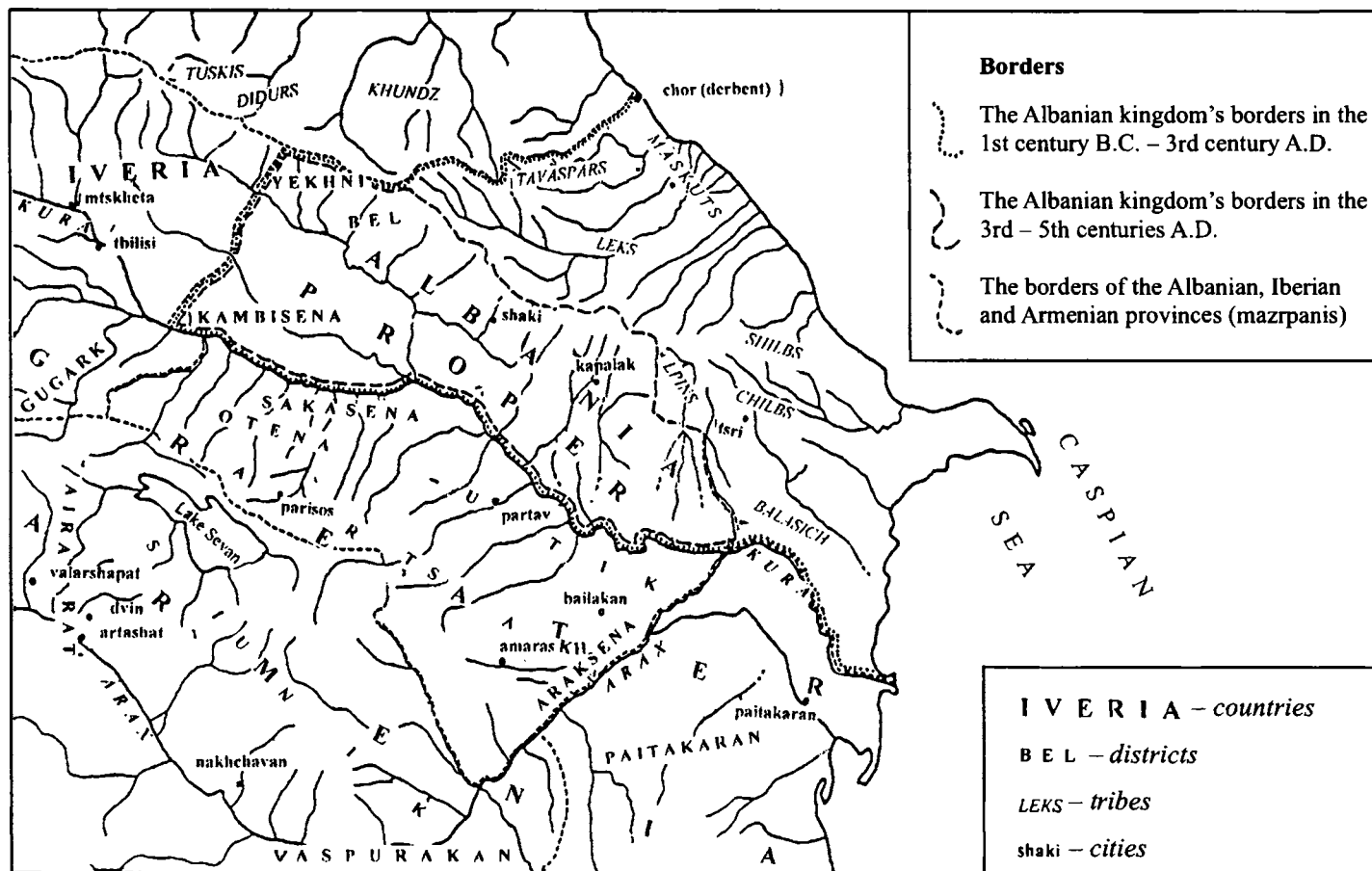
Map 13 Albania in the 5th century A.D.
 (after Mamedova 1986)

1 – borders; 2 – area of influence; 3 – city;
 4 – capital; 5 – districts; 6 – provinces



Map 14 Albania in the 6th – 7th centuries A.D.
 (after Mamedova 1986)

1 – borders; 2 – area of influence; 3 – city;
 4 – capital; 5 – districts; 6 – provinces



Map 15 A map of Caucasian Albania (after Akopian 1987)

to rely on Greco-Roman authors if their evidence contradicted her concepts. Instead, she relied completely on Movses Kagankatvatsi for, in her view, he knew the situation much better than anyone else (Mamedova 1987: 12-13).

Finally, Mamedova represented the Albanian Church as apostolic and autocephalic, independent of the Armenian Church. She maintained that the former was subordinated to the latter only after the Arab conquest. She also complained that the easy assimilation of the Albanians by their more powerful neighbors was the result of the Albanian Church's weakness (Mamedova 1986: 217-238).

Mamedova represented the Albanians as a highly integrated ethnos, one of the ancestors of the Azeri people, as if the Albanians were the main builders of the classical and early medieval culture of Azerbaijan (Mamedova 1986: 246). In order to develop this concept further, Mamedova put forward the idea of a uniform early Albanian ethnos, as though it had flourished between the 1st century B.C. and 8th century A.D. throughout all the territory of Albania. While extending the scope of her studies, she began to maintain that the Albanian ethnos developed continuously in Artsakh up to the 19th century (Mamedova 1989a). Armed with the Soviet theory of ethnos, Mamedova did her best to demonstrate that all the factors were present in early medieval Albania that were usually used by the Soviet scholars to describe an ethnos: state unity within stable territorial borders, unity of culture (language, writing system, literary tradition, religion) as well as self-awareness of themselves as Albanian. To put it other way, she was highly affected by the Soviet ethnonational model of political development, and attempted to interpolate it into the remote past. As a result, she constructed an Albanian national state long before the national state became a political reality.

She insisted on the continuity of an Albanian state tradition from the 3rd century B.C. to the 8th century A.D., and argued that it was in unbroken development in Artsakh and Siunik in the 9th – 14th centuries, and in the Karabagh polities in the 15th – 18th centuries. She argued that an apostolic autocephalic church dominated Albania that long outlasted the original Albanian Kingdom and survived until 1836. Mamedova adduced proofs that Albanian self-awareness also survived up to the 18th – 19th centuries. In her view, the Albanian ethnos made up the core of both the Albanian state and its derivatives. In contrast to Armenian authors, Mamedova refused to recognize the existence of any Armenian state between the late 1st century B.C. and 5th century A.D. because, she reasoned, it was partitioned by Rome, Persia, and, then, Byzantium. Since she related cultural progress to statehood, she could not believe that, being denied a state of her own, Armenia was able to develop its culture successfully to the extent that it affected the neighboring Albanians. That is why, despite the existence of early historical narratives about Albania in Armenian (for example, the famous manuscript by Movses Kagankatvatsi) and the almost entire lack of written documents in Albanian, Mamedova reproduced once again Yampol'sky's and Buniatov's view of the derivative nature of the well-known Armenian manuscripts, as though they were translations from some Albanian originals. Moreover, she went even further and

assumed that those Armenians who arrived on the right bank of the Kura River in early medieval times had been “Albanized”. She recognized that the Albanians began to write in Armenian in the 12th century (in her view only! V. Sh.). Yet, she claimed that “language was not the only ethnic marker” and that, despite language replacement, Albanian self-awareness survived for a long time, up to the 18th – 19th centuries.

Mamedova acknowledged that the Albanians of the lowlands of the Kura and Arax Rivers were Turkified. In her view, it was for this reason that the center of Albanian Christianity was moved to the Gandzasar Monastery and there was an attempt to restore the Albanian Kingdom in Artsakh. Mamedova avoided calling it the “Khachen Principality”. While stressing the difference between the Albanian and Armenian Churches of the late medieval period, she failed to explain why the local Albanians shifted to speaking Armenian. Instead, she called the Armenian khachkars “Albanian”. She explained the identity shift from Albanian to Armenian as one that, in her view, occurred in the 19th century, with reference to the abolition of the Albanian Church by the Sacred Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1836 (Mamedova 1989a, 1990a, 1990b). It is worth noting that other Azeri scholars enthusiastically shared this concept as well (for example, see Akhundov, Akhundov 1986: 106-107).

It is worth mentioning that this whole construction is clearly rooted in the reasoning of the Russian chauvinist, V. L. Velichko, who ran the semi-official newspaper, “Kavkaz”, in 1897-1899. He demonstrated his open hostility towards the Armenians and did his best to stir up the rest of the Caucasian population against them. He was especially active during that brief period when the Russian authorities implemented their anti-Armenian policy. At the turn of the 20th century, the negative stereotype of the Armenians was cultivated in Russia, including the ideas that they were a rootless people who were highly unreliable and represented a “fifth column” (Suny 1981: 131-132, 1983: 15, 1993: 44-51). Acting as editor-in-chief of the chauvinistic “Kavkaz”, Velichko carried out the orders of Russian officials. It is instructive that his pamphlets were being republished in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s and were very popular there (for example, see Buniatov 1990: 62-74).

Mamedova’s viewpoint reflected the revisionists’ views as well. Thus, while isolating Karabagh from early Armenian history, she argued that some Turkic groups lived there from the 3rd century A.D., and that was why “Artsakh was part of all the Azeri political formations” (Mamedova 1986, 1989a, 1990a, 1990b. Also see Buniatov 1990: 34-37). At the turn of the 1990s, Mamedova actively advocated her theory, both in the Azerbaijan mass media and at international conferences (Mamedova 1989a, 1989b, 1990a, 1990b). In July 1991, she took part in the Caucasian Days in Berlin, where she gave lectures on the history of southern and northern Azerbaijan. In response to her talk on the “Albanian ethnos” at a conference in Paris, a specialist in the history of Armenian art and culture emphasized that the buildings with inscriptions of the 12th – 13th centuries, which

she referred to, were of Armenian origin. He also had no doubt that the “History of the Agvans” was originally completed in Armenian (Mamedova 1990b: 395).

The publication of Mamedova’s book was appreciated in Azerbaijan (for that, see Sumbatzade 1987: 226-227; Svazian 1989a: 56). Academician Buniatov published a very positive review of it, in which he emphasized once again the importance of his own ideas about the independent Albanian Church, the Albanian literary tradition, and especially, the great stability of Albanian state boundaries (Buniatov 1986a). A review completed by Igrar Aliev was no less complimentary. He called Mamedova a “knight of the truth” who restlessly struggled against the “Armenian falsification of history”. Yet, being a professional historian, Aliev could not fail to mention striking errors in Mamedova’s work – her ignorance of the date of birth of Mkhitar Gosh and confusion about the genealogy of the Albanian Arsacid Dynasty, which was Parthian rather than Persian, as Mamedova believed.

An Armenian response

The Armenian reviews of the Mamedova’s book were not so positive. Her doctoral thesis was viewed unfavorably in five reviews, including those of major Armenian specialists such as S. T. Yeremian and G. Kh. Sarkisian (Sarkisian, Muradian 1988: 42; Muradian 1990: 148). Their arguments were presented in several publications that accompanied Mamedova’s book (for example, see Arutiunian 1987; Akopian, Muradian, Yuzbashian 1987; Sarkisian, Muradian 1988; Svazian 1989a. Also see Muradian 1990: 9-52). The Armenian authors pointed to Mamedova’s pretentious and unfounded arguments. They objected to the formation of any integrated “Albanian ethnos” in Albania and noted that the term “Albania” began to be used in respect to the right bank of the Kura River only at the very end of the 4th century A.D., when a distinct province of the Sussanian Empire was established there. The population of that province was heterogeneous and included the Artsakh Armenians. After that, a distinct Albanian self-awareness, distinct from Armenian, developed among the local Armenians. Then, after the brief and unsuccessful attempt of the Armenian Bagratids to restore Greater Armenia in the end of the 9th – 10th centuries, the country broke up into a few separate polities. Thus, local self-awareness developed there, which was happily exploited by the local rulers, who refused to be subordinated to the Bagratids. This was the starting point of the arguments of the medieval authors on the right bank of the Kura River, who did their best to isolate Albania from Armenia. Yet they were ignorant of the true history of early medieval Albania and the Albanian tribes because they themselves were Armenians in language and culture. In fact, by the 10th – 12th centuries, the term “Albania” had lost any ethnic meaning and was used only as a geographical term. At the same time, the dominance of monophysitism on the right side of the Kura River was the basis of the Armenization of what remained of the former substantial Albanian population (Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 189; Mnatsakanian 1969: 14-15, 50-58; Ulubabian 1971; Akopian 1987: 242-276;

Muradian 1990: 9-25, 143, 149-150).

Armenian scholars were indignant that Mamedova, together with other Azeri authors, refused to acknowledge the enlightening activities of Mesrob Mashtots, and especially his contribution to the development of the Albanian writing system. They were struck by her attempt to deprive them of the Armenian medieval literature composed in Artsakh and of the important Armenian medieval figures who were born there (Arutiunian 1987: 34-37, 55; Muradian 1990: 62-74; Mkrtchian 1989: 204; Svazian 1989a: 51-52, 1991: 9-11). While deconstructing what had been built up by Mamedova, the Armenian authors noted also that there was no question of any uniform Albanian language in Caucasian Albania. They emphasized that the Albanian writing system invented at the beginning of the 5th century A.D. served by no means as an all-Albanian script but was used for the distinct Gargara language, which was unintelligible to the other tribes of the Albanian alliance (Mnatsakanian 1969: 35, 67-68, 71; Ulubabian 1970: 162, 1979b: 110; Arutiunian 1987: 35, 51). Later on, A. A. Akopian attempted to demonstrate that a "Gargara tribe" was a fantasy, for this term was used by the medieval Armenian authors as a pejorative one to refer to the population on the left bank of the Kura River (Akopian 1987: 57-74). Yet, if so, there were some reasons to identify the Gargarians with the Albanians and to assume that there was a writing system of trans-Albanian importance. True, it was used only by the elite, since there was no question of public literacy in the early medieval period. There are no other reasons to assume the development of any uniform Albanian ethnic community during that period, either.

In fact, as the Armenian scholars demonstrated, Mamedova invented the Albanian ethnos in order to push the history of the Azeri people far back into the past. Indeed, she constructed an unbroken ethnic continuity between the Albanians and the Azeris, and language shift was not able to disturb it. As a result, historical Albania turned out to be early Azerbaijan (Mnatsakanian 1969: 58-59; Ulubabian 1970: 162; Arutiunian 1987: 33, 51; Svazian 1989a: 50; Muradian 1990: 151. Also, see Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 64). As concerned the formation of the Azeri people, some Armenian authors dated the completion of this process to as late as the 15th – 17th centuries, and related its main component to the Turks rather than to any Agvans (Albanians). For example, G. S. Svazian openly maintained that, "there were no reasons to view the Albanians as the ancestors of the Azeri people" (Svazian 1989a: 50, 1991: 18. Also see Smbatian 1989: 16).

While discussing the Albanian boundaries during the early period, the Armenian scholars referred to Strabo's evidence (not always plainly, though) in which the boundary coincided with the Kura rather than the Arax River as Mamedova and other Azeri authors insisted. It is worth noting that, from the beginning of the Armenian-Azeri dispute over Caucasian Albania, Armenian scholars insisted that, until the very beginning of the 5th century A.D., the Armenian-Albanian boundary passed along the Kura River. They held, further, that Agvank Province in Persia in the 5th century and the Mikhranid Kingdom in the 6th

century had nothing to do with the real Albania (Mnatsakanian 1969: 25-33, 51-55; Akopian 1968; Ulubabian 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1979b, 1981b, 1988: 85-86; Akopian 1987: 21-27, 96-124, 142-149; Mikaelian, Khurshudian 1988: 44-45; Svazian 1974, 1989a: 48-49, 1989b: 8-10, 1991: 10-15; Smbatian 1989). Indeed, all the classical authors testified that point, which is obvious to everybody thoroughly analyzing the whole volume of evidence, rather than selecting only the evidence that fits a concept, as was often done by the Azeri researchers (for that, see Novosel'tsev 1979).

In order to prove the location of the boundary in an earlier period, an Armenian historian even attempted to employ archaeological data. Indeed, as archaeologists had established, the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers were occupied by a culture that employed jug burials and was quite different from the Yaloylu-tepe culture on the left bank of the Kura River. The Armenian historian identified the former with the early Armenians, although he agreed that it was impossible to draw a sharp boundary between the two cultures (Akopian 1987: 15-16, 82). At the same time, as the Azeri archaeologists put it, the Yaloylu-tepe culture of the 4th century B.C. – 3rd century A.D. spread across almost all the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan and included even the Alazan' valley of Georgia. That was why they viewed it as the "culture of Caucasian Albania in the early class period" (Akhmedov and Babaev 1986: 12-14; Babaev 1990: 141). As concerned the jug burial culture, certain Azeri researchers had no doubt that they were their own ancestors (Khalilov 1985b), and this approach even found a place in the Soviet historical encyclopedia (Yampol'sky 1961: 354). More cautious authors pointed out that the jug burial culture had developed over a very long period, from the 3rd century B.C. to the 7th century A.D., and was widespread throughout Transcaucasia. That was why it was impossible to identify it with any distinct ethnic group (Babaev 1990: 113-114, 181).

From the late 1960s, after the Armenian scholars realized that the attempts of their Azeri counterparts to identify the Albanians as their direct ancestors led to territorial claims, they changed strategy. They began to doubt Yeremian's former ideas, that the people on the right bank of the Kura River had only joined Greater Armenia in the 2nd century B.C. and that the local Albanians were Armenized no early than by the 4th – 6th centuries A.D. (Yeremian 1958a: 303-304). Now some Armenian scholars began to deny any Albanian presence on the right bank of the Kura River in the early medieval period and argued that all the territory between the Kura and Arax Rivers belonged to the Armenian Kingdom from the 6th century B.C. Thus, the Armenians had lived there from prehistoric times, and the ethnic boundary along the Kura River was determined much earlier than the time that the Albanian Kingdom emerged (Sogomonian 1969; Ulubabian 1968, 1970; Mnatsakanian 1969: 17-20, 34-36; Akopian 1987: 15-18; Arutiunian 1987: 38-43, 51; Mikaelian, Khurshudian 1988: 44; Svazian 1987: 45, 1989b: 4, 12, 1991: 14). Contrary to the traditional approach, which identified the early medieval Utis with the ethnographic Udins, a numerically small ethnic group of Lezghin origin who are

considered to be the direct ancestors of the medieval Albanians (for example, see Yeremian 1958a: 304), B. Ulubabian began to argue that the Utis were not only Armenized at a very early time (for that, see Mnatsakanian 1969: 18-20; Akopian 1987: 82), but that they were Armenians, if not from the very beginning (Ulubabian 1968; 1970).

The writer and historian, B. Ulubabian, one of the most active participants in the dispute in question, became the chairman of the Union of Writers of Nagorny Karabagh in 1949. In June 1965, he was one of those who signed a petition to Moscow demanding the unification of the NKAR with Armenia. In the mid-1970s, after the aforementioned Session of the Nagorny Karabagh Regional Branch of the CPA he, together with many other NKAR writers, historians and journalists, was severely criticized for “nationalism” (Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutaflan 1994: 146-147). Yet, this did not discourage him, and he kept studying the history of Nagorny Karabagh and objecting to the Azeris’ view of it.

The approach of the Academician K. A. Melik-Oganjanian was less consistent. On the one hand, he put into doubt the suggestion that the early population of Artsakh was ever Armenized, i.e. he hinted that it was of Armenian origin from the very beginning. Yet, on the other hand, he agreed that the peripheral Agvans had actually been Armenized. Obviously, he considered it erroneous to use the term “periphery” for Artsakh and Utik, which had been parts of Armenia before the end of the 4th century A.D. (Melik-Oganjanian 1969: 189-190). The latter view was shared by Mnatsakanian and Ulubabian, who believed in the extensive settlement of Armenians on the left side of the Kura River as well, especially in Kambisene (Mnatsakanian 1969: 38-44; Ulubabian 1979b: 119)⁵⁶. It seems that Yeremian also shared this approach in his later days. One could come across the same view in the “Historical Overview” of Nagorny Karabagh, completed by the major specialists of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR in 1988⁵⁷.

To put it briefly, from the 1960s, Armenian scholars were constructing their own myth, one that denied any relationships between the Albanians, on the one hand, and the Armenians and Azeris, on the other (for that, see Hewsen 1982: 28-30; Novosel'tsev 1991: 198-199). At the same time, the myth imposed upon the Armenians of the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers and some other regions of Azerbaijan the attitude that it would be insulting to consider them “Armenized Albanians” (Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 190; Ulubabian 1968). This idea met the demands of the Armenians in the very late 1980s and was cited at their meetings (for example, see Mirzoian 1989; Ismailov 1989d: 18).

Interestingly enough, during the same period Georgian researchers used the same strategy as well. Where the Azeri authors found early Albanian tribes who were later Georgianized, the Georgian historians located some genuine Georgian tribes (for example, see Muskhelishvili 1982: 12-13, 17; Papuashvili 1987). For example, whereas G. Geibullaev identified the Ingiloi as descendants of Georgianized Albanians (Geibullaev 1989), the Georgian scholar T. Papuashvili treated them as “full-blood Georgians” and accused his opponent of an attempt to

deprive them of their Georgian Motherland, language and culture (Papuashvili 1987: 190).

In Armenia, the most radical concept of the history of Nagorny Karabagh was developed by some revisionists. For example, it seemed insufficient for S. M. Aivazian to call Nagorny Karabagh the only Armenian Principality that managed to secure its independence and the one that led the mass Armenian movement against the "Turkish-Persian yoke". He went much further, and called Atrapatakan a territory of eastern Armenia. He maintained that the Armenians accounted for 97 percent of the Karabagh population at the beginning of the 19th century, when it joined Russia (Aivazian 1997: 355). He also called Baku the capital of eastern Armenia and, thus, left no place for the Azeris on the map of Transcaucasia (Aivazian 1997: 383). He identified the Azeri ancestors with the Turkic "Karapapakhis", semi-nomads who arrived in the Kura River Valley from Iran only in the 18th century (Aivazian 1997: 440).

At the same time, Muradian and some other Armenian scholars advocated a more moderate view of the Armenization of the former Albanians on the right bank of the Kura River and put into question the assumption that the local inhabitants were of Armenian origin from the very beginning. They recognized that there was in fact no reliable evidence in support of this idea. Yet, they reasoned, Mamedova also had no good grounds to include all the right bank of the Kura River in historical Albania. The Armenian specialists came to the conclusion that she had based her approach not so much on historical evidence as on contemporary social and political requirements to "demonstrate the territorial and to a certain extent the ethnic identity of early Caucasian Albania with the contemporary Azerbaijan SSR" (Muradian 1990: 26-52)⁵⁸.

The discussion of Mamedova's thesis took place at a crucial time in both Armenian and Azeri history. The year 1987 became a landmark, after which the process of democratization accelerated in both republics, and at the same time one could observe the rapid escalation of the Karabagh conflict. On August 14, 1987, the Yerevan newspaper, "Grakan Tert" (Literature Weekly), published an article discussing Mamedova's Ph.D. thesis on Caucasian Albania. As we already know, Mamedova did her best to break Artsakh away from the Armenian community and to place it in opposition to the latter⁵⁹). Armenians took her study as a "falsification of Armenian history", and as an attempt to appropriate the outstanding pieces of Armenian literature and architecture. They pointed out that the source of the Caucasian Albania maps that had been completed by Mamedova was the "Encyclopedia of Islam" published in Turkey in the 1940s (Sarkisian, Muradian 1988: 46; Muradian 1990: 154-155). The Armenians were supported by the director of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, A. N. Sakharov, who criticized Mamedova for ignorance of some seminal publications, and the same Yerevan newspaper published his official response. This was followed by an article by the well known Baku historian, the Academician Ziya Buniatov, Mamedova's consultant (Buniatov 1987b). He accused Sakharov of incompetence

in Caucasian history (Sakharov is an expert in the medieval history of Russia. V. Sh.). This was a tricky evaluation because, in fact, a detailed review of Mamedova's thesis had been completed by Moscow specialists in Caucasian history, and it was officially signed by Sakharov (for that, see Muradian 1990: 146-149)⁶⁰).

In his response, Buniatov reproduced all his well-known ideas about Caucasian Albania, its territorial borders, cultural activists and the process of Armenization on the right side of the Kura River. His interpretation was that Armenian scholars were eager to monopolize the historical field and to block Azeri researchers' access to Caucasian Albania's history (Buniatov 1987b: 135). The Armenian scholars, on the other hand, not only demonstrated the poor ability of their Azeri counterparts to deal with historical documents, but also pointed out the political connotations of their interpretations of Caucasian Albania's history.

The latter point was especially emphasized during 1987-1988 by the Armenian authors. The official attitude of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR was manifested in the "Historical Overview" of Nagorny Karabagh published in 1988, while the Armenian-Azeri conflict was accelerating. This pamphlet contained a highly condensed but very rich account of Nagorny Karabagh's history before 1917, completed by the well-known Armenian historian and chairman of the Department in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, Professor P. M. Muradian. The latter emphasized the following points. First, between 590 and 331 B.C., Artsakh as part of Eruandid Armenia, belonged initially to the state of Media and, then to Achaemenian Persia. After that, regardless of political turmoil and transformations, it still stayed within Armenia even after Byzantium and Iran had partitioned Armenia in A.D. 387. Second, after the abolition of the Armenian Kingdom in A.D. 428, the Persians merged Artsakh with the Albanian Kingdom, which had formerly only occupied the left bank of the Kura River. The author cited numerous classical Greek and Roman writers, who reported that both Artsakh and Utik were parts of Armenia in late classical times (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 9-10). Third, at the turn of the 7th century, the Albanian Kingdom had broken into a number of small polities and ceased to exist. At the same time, Artsakh and Utik formed the distinct Principality of the Aranshakhiks in the very end of the 5th century. They were subordinated to the Persian Dynasty of the Mikhranids in the 7th century. During this period, the name Albania was applied only to land on the right bank of the Kura River; it had lost its former links with the ethnic Albanians. This was the country that had been the focus of the "History of Albania" by Movses Kagankatvatsi, who was represented by the "Historical Overview" as an Armenian historian (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 11-12).

Fourth, the region was called Khachen (after the Armenian "khach" which means cross) in the 10th – 13th centuries because it was populated by Armenians and ruled by the Armenian princes of the Aranshakhik Dynasty. This prosperous period was memorialized by numerous pieces of Armenian architecture, including the remarkable Gandzasar Monastery. The Gandzasar catholicos served as the

spiritual leader of the Artsakh Armenians (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 7-8, 12, 16-17). Fifth, many regions of Armenia were subjugated by the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the late medieval period. Yet, the Khachen Principality held relative independence and gradually became the “center of the Armenian liberation movement, with a Russian orientation” (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 12-13). Sixth, it was argued that the Turkic population arrived in Karabagh only in the 16th – 18th centuries, that the Turkic khanates had been established there only at the end of that period, and that even by the beginning of the 19th century the Turks did not enjoy full dominance, because of Armenian resistance. This situation of confrontation faced the Russians when, after the Gulistan treaty of 1813, Karabagh was transferred to Russia by Iran (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 13-14. Also see Khurshudian 1989: 5). Yet, the argument of later Turkic arrival did not correspond with the evidence, referred to in the same “Historical Overview”. That is, even at the beginning of the 15th century the Armenian villagers of Karabagh were reportedly paying tribute to the “pagans”; i.e. they were in some sort of dependency upon the Muslims (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 17).

The authors of the “Historical Overview” insisted that the Artsakh population was homogeneous and spoke only Armenian at least from the 2nd – 1st centuries B.C. In their view, this pattern was observed for centuries and was the basis of Count G. A. Potemkin’s plan in 1783 to establish a national Armenian state there (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 17-18). With reference to both archival data and documents from the 19th centuries, the Armenian researchers denied any mass Armenian movements out of Iran to Karabagh after 1828. They argued that there were only a few newcomers, who were unable to play any major role in the history of Karabagh (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 18-19). To put it other way, the Armenian authors emphasized two points most strongly – the unbroken continuity of the Armenian population in Karabagh despite all the big losses dealt by Persian and Turkic raids, and the numerous monuments of the Armenian (Christian) culture in Karabagh, that witnessed a continuous Armenian presence there for centuries. At the same time, it was noted that Turkic monuments (mosques, palaces) were built there only from the end of the 18th into the 19th century (Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 20-22). It is instructive that the Armenian authors used Armenian terms and names wherever it was possible – Artsakh instead of Karabagh, Movses Kagankatvatsi instead of Moses of Kalankatui, etc. This had great symbolic meaning to them by making the links between Karabagh and Armenia much closer.

In brief, the pamphlet’s perspective rested on the following. Artsakh was an Armenian land from the very beginning, since it was part of the Armenian Kingdom between the 6th century B.C. and 4th century A.D. The unbroken continuity of Armenian statehood and the Armenian ethnos could be seen on the right side of the Kura River until the beginning of the 19th century. Artsakh had played a major role in the history of the Armenian people as a refuge where the Armenian people survived and where their national liberation movement was born. Finally, the Turks had arrived there as late as the 18th century.

The propaganda pamphlets issued in Armenia in the very late 1980s entirely denied there were any local roots of the Azeri people. Being grounded on the idea of a strict relationship between language and ethnicity, they put the Azeris' appearance in Transcaucasia down to Turkic migrations from the trans-Caspian region. It was argued that the "Albanian tribes had no relationship to Turkic tribes, be they of a biological or ethnocultural nature". The Azeri scholars were accused of the shameless appropriation of the Albanian and Persian cultural heritages (Khurshudian 1989: 4-5).

P. M. Muradian demonstrated a more careful approach in his own works. Quite correctly, he related medieval identity to religious loyalty and explained the transformation of the ethnic map of Transcaucasia with reference to the schism of the 7th century. Since that time, the Armenians had begun to identify themselves with monophysitism, and the Albanian monophysites were naturally included in the Armenian community. Over time, new waves of Turkic nomads arrived, who finally established their political dominance during the Seljuq period, and intensive Islamization and Turkification of the local inhabitants commenced. Muradian clearly demonstrated the absurdity of the struggle over medieval figures, who were provided with different identities by different historical sources. At the same time, he populated medieval Karabagh with Armenians rather than with Armenized Albanians, for they not only composed their manuscripts in Armenian but also actually emphasized their Armenian origins. Finally, he argued that the Turks were present in Karabagh only from the late 18th century (Muradian 1989, 1990: 5-8, 140).

Muradian expressed his opinions at a round table meeting arranged by the "Voprosy Istorii" (Issues in History) magazine in Moscow on February 20-21, 1989. They were immediately objected to by a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, the deputy director of the Baku Institute of History, M. A. Ismailov. He was indignant at Muradian's suggestion that there were no Azeri people at all in the early medieval period. He emphatically objected to the idea of the identification of the Azeris with the Ottoman Turks (nothing had been said by Muradian about that. V. Sh.). He represented the Azeris as the direct descendants of the Albanians and maintained that Azeri states had flourished in the Albanian territory in medieval times. He referred to evidence for a mass Armenian resettlement from Iran to Transcaucasia after the Turkmanchai treaty of 1828. He concluded that "Karabagh was an Albanian region of Artsakh", without noting that the very term Artsakh was of Armenian origin (Ismailov 1989a). This same Ismailov had been the editor of the revisionist collection of essays on Azeri ethnogenesis published in 1984. His attempt to identify the Iranian-speaking Sakae with the Turks had been severely criticized by Igrar Aliev (Aliev 1986b).

The clash of the myths

In Azerbaijan, the historian, Igrar Aliev, was ordered to complete a response to the Armenian “Historical Overview” of Nagorny Karabagh history. As we remember, not only had he written a positive review of Mamedova’s book, but he also shared many of her conclusions. In his response, Aliev emphasized that the Armenians were by no means indigenous inhabitants of Transcaucasia. He based himself on the orthodox conception of the Armenian people’s development and treated the Armenian revisionists with irony⁶¹). He himself believed that the early Armenian tribes moved gradually from the west and arrived in the Ararat Valley only in the 2nd century B.C. He wrote of the “Armenian expansion”, of their aggressive policies, and recalled Strabo’s warnings about that. His criticism was aimed mainly at the attempts of Armenian authors to consider the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers genuinely Armenian. He maintained that Armenized Albanians were the core population of Karabagh. True, he recognized that in the 2nd – 1st centuries B.C., Armenia from time to time occupied Karabagh, but this did not last for very long and did not affect the indigenous inhabitants in any major way. Like Mamedova, he argued that, in contrast to Armenia, Albania had secured its independence between the 1st and 4th centuries A.D. and still had control over the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers, including Karabagh (Aliev 1989b: 19)⁶²). The Albanian tribes of Uti, Tsavdei and, probably, Gargara lived in Karabagh at that time. Thus, the region was certainly not “genuinely Armenian” and was Armenized much later.

Contrary to Mamedova, Aliev recognized the schism at the turn of the 7th century and assumed that the Albanian Church had broken away from Byzantium as a result. In the beginning of the 8th century, being pressed by the Arabs, it adopted monophysitism and became subordinated to the Armenian Church. In this environment the Armenization of the Karabagh population took place. The Armenian liturgical language became, first, the literary and then the spoken language. At the same time, Aliev shared Mamedova’s idea that, despite any language replacement, the Albanians had retained their distinct identity. The latter laid the grounds for a revival of the “Albanian spirit” in the Khachen Principality in the 12th – 13th centuries, under Hasan Jalal. Jalal called himself the “King of Albania” and built the Gandzasar Monastery, which later on became the center of a distinct Albanian Church (Aliev 1988b, 1989b: 16-28, 44-47, 53-57, 62-65, 73. Also see Buniatov 1990: 34-37).

It is evident that, in order to isolate medieval Karabagh from Armenian history, Aliev advantageously employed the same approach that was taken by the Armenians scholars to appropriate the state of Urartu. He stressed that the existence of Armenian written documents in Karabagh did not prove anything because Armenian could only be used for recording purposes and differed from the vernacular (Aliev 1988b: 66). He covered the later history of Karabagh only in brief, and he failed to discuss the problem of the Turkic arrival, the issue of their

relationships with the local inhabitants, and the like. Instead, he emphasized that the numerically small group of Turks merged with the indigenous groups. Aliev did not discuss at all how they could transfer their language to the natives under those conditions, yet he claimed that while retaining their culture, and having shifted to Turkic, the Albanians constituted the basis of the future Azeri people (Aliev 1988b: 48).

This viewpoint, albeit with some corrections, was shared by many Azeri researchers. Sumbatzade agreed with the Armenians to the extent that he thought the right bank of the Kura River was part of Armenia between the 2nd century B.C. and the 4th century A.D. Yet, since Artsakh and Utik were transferred to Albania at the end of the 4th century A.D. he considered it incorrect to include the right bank of the Kura River in Armenia. He also objected to the idea of the Armenization of the local Albanians (Sumbatzade 1990: 59-60, 66). Over time, the revisionists began to share this approach as well, although initially they had nothing against the idea of the Armenization of the Albanians. For example, in the beginning of the 1980s, Alijarov recognized that the Albanians of Karabagh were Armenized and were a constituent part of the Armenian people (Alijarov 1984: 21). Geibullaev was positive about this, as well (Geibullaev 1991: 24).

Later on, Alijarov changed his views. He began to argue that Karabagh had never been part of the Armenian lands. Quite to the contrary, over the 1600 years after A.D. 387, the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers had been incorporated into a system of state formations in the territory of Azerbaijan, and Karabagh was listed as one of the important Azeri Khanates of the 16th – 18th centuries. In his approach, Alijarov addressed only political-administrative rather than ethnic factors. He pointed out that after A.D. 387, Karabagh had never belonged to any state called Armenia. Moreover, he emphasized that, “during the course of the 14 centuries adduced in the schema, with the exception of the existence of the previously mentioned Kingdom of Ani, Armenia was not represented on the map of Transcaucasia in terms of its own statehood” (Alijarly 1996: 117-118). Yet, there were even more reasons to address this argument to Azerbaijan itself. Besides, a thoughtful reader would notice that Alijarov avoided discussing the issues of language, religion and culture. In particular, while mentioning the Khachen Principality, he failed to acknowledge that its population spoke and wrote Armenian and had contributed to the Armenian culture. While denying the Karabagh Khanate’s dependency on Persia in the 18th century, Alijarov did his best to demonstrate that both its Turkic and Armenian populations combined their efforts to resist Persian intervention. He complained that the separatism of some Armenian meliqs who undermined this unity made Karabagh easy prey for the neighboring powers. He mentioned that the last ruler of the Karabagh Khanate, Ibrahim-Khan, signed a treaty for its annexation by Russia. That was why Alijarov was indignant that the Karabagh Khanate was abolished in 1822 and replaced by the Armenian region in 1828, despite the fact that Turkic-speakers accounted for the bulk of the local population (Alijarly 1996: 119-123).

Igrar Aliev also stressed that a strong “Azeri Karabagh Khanate” had developed in Karabagh in the 18th – 19th centuries where the Turks made up the dominant majority. That was why, he argued, “Karabagh joined Russia as a purely Muslim estate rather than an Armenian land”. The drastic ethno-demographic changes took place only after the Turkmanchai peace treaty of 1828, when a large number of Armenians began to resettle from Turkey and Iran to Transcaucasia. As a result of this reasoning, Aliev came to the conclusion that, “until the 19th century, there was no substantial Armenian ethnic population in the territory that is now occupied by the NKAR” (Aliev 1989b: 75-78).

The issue of Armenian resettlement to Transcaucasia in the early 19th century, in particular after 1828, plays the key role in contemporary anti-Armenian propaganda in Azerbaijan. It is maintained that after Russia annexed Transcaucasia, the Russian authorities were planning to establish a Christian stronghold in Armenia against the Muslims. To that end, mass Armenian immigration from Iran was encouraged. Referring to the census register of 1823, Azeri scholars point out the undoubted predominance of Turks (they are called the “Azeri”) in Karabagh at that time – 15,729 Turkic families versus 4,366 Armenian families. They complain about the Armenian mass migrations out of Iran and Turkey in the 1820s, and again in the last quarter of the 19th century, due to which Armenians began to predominate over the local Turks. Some Azeri authors went so far as to argue that the local Armenians enjoyed a different culture and spoke a different language before all those resettlements (Ismailov 1989c: 33; 1989d: 6-7; Velikhanova 1989: 125-127; Khalilov 1990: 39-41; Buniiatov 1990: 329, 361; Alijarly 1996: 126-128; Mamedov 2000: 31). The last point in this dispute was put by Buniiatov, who maintained that the “Armenian graves in Karabagh lands cannot be dated to any time earlier than 150 years ago” (Buniiatov 1989: 4). This Azeri view is based mainly on the Report of the Armenian Resettlement out of Persia, ascribed to the famous Russian intellectual and diplomat, A. S. Griboedov⁶³, and also on publications by Russian chauvinists at the turn of the 20th century, such as N. I. Shavrov and V. L. Velichko (Buniiatov 1990: 56-74)⁶⁴.

On their side, Armenian scholars refer to historical documents of the 18th – early 19th centuries, which reported a substantial Armenian population in Karabagh. This had decreased sharply by 1823, because of quite recent forcible emigrations to Georgia and Shirvan. Concerning the Armenian settlers of 1828-1832, only a minor part of them arrived in Karabagh (Muradian 1990: 111-116; Bournoutian 1992: 68; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 76-77; Barsegov 1998: 133-134). The Armenian scholars did not dispute the fact of mass Armenian migrations from Iran and the Ottoman Empire to the territory of eastern Armenia as a result of the Russian-Persian and Russian-Ottoman wars of 1826-1829. They acknowledged the fact that in the very early 19th century, Armenians accounted for no more than 20 percent of the population of the Yerevan Khanate, and that they outnumbered the Muslims only after 1828-1832 (Aslanian et al. 1966: 87; Parsamian 1972: 49-52, 66; Bournoutian 1996: 77-79). Yet, this conclusion was

irrelevant to Karabagh, for which there were no statistical data at all (Bournoutian 1992: 67).

Demography, economics and ethnic minorities

It became evident in the end of the 1980s that grievances and resentments between the two groups that had accumulated for decades were the background of the dispute over Caucasian Albania and the historical fate of the Albanians. For example, Azeri authors began to mention the forcible resettlement of the Azeris from Armenia in 1948-1953; their flight from Yerevan in the mid-1960s; the replacement of Turkic place names in Armenia; and the destruction of Muslim gravestones (Vahabzade, Aliyarov 1988: 433; Buniiatov, Neimatova 1988: 105-106, 111-112, note 2; Aliev 1989b: 100; Guliev 1989; Buniiatov 1990a: 360; Guseinov 1992). On their side, the Armenians also complained about the destruction of dozens of the Armenian cultural monuments and the ascription of medieval Armenian khachkars to Azeri ancestors (Svazian 1987; Arutiunian 1987: 55; Ulubabian 1988; Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 21-22; Khodjabekian, Asatrian 1988: 26-27; Dadamian 1989).

Economic claims were a special category. The Azeris complained that Azerbaijan had been turned into a region for the extraction of raw materials by the central power using colonial methods. It was stressed that, while having a much larger population than the Baltic republics or, say, Georgia, the Turkic republics of the USSR, including Azerbaijan, had more restricted budgets and less income per person. For example, the income per person in the Turkic republics was 5-7 times lower than in the Baltic republics. At the same time, Azerbaijan provided the USSR with very important products for the chemical industry: 80 percent of the latter were removed from the republic, which was left to cope with a highly polluted natural environment. Azerbaijan produced a large amount of cotton, wool and grapes, but did not have the capacity to process them. Thus, it was losing money by exporting raw materials and importing finished products. As a result, Azerbaijan was backward in standard of living, not only with respect to the Baltic republics (1.5 times lower), but even in comparison with neighboring Georgia and Armenia (Ismailov 1989b).

The Armenians of Nagorny Karabagh also had reasons for dissatisfaction. First, they pointed to an unfavorable demographic trend during the Soviet era, which had resulted in a change in the demographic balance between Armenians and Azeris in favor of the latter. For example, in Nagorny Karabagh between 1926 and 1979, the proportion of Azeris grew from 10 to 23 percent and that of Armenians decreased from 90 to 76 percent (Mirzoian 1988: 43-44, 1989; Walker 1991: 116). However, one could explain this through the effects of various factors: the higher level of urbanization among the Armenians, who left for big cities; the higher birth rate among the Azeris; the resettlement of Azeris from other areas; big losses among the Armenians during World War II; the forcible deportations of the very

late 1940s (Mirzoian 1988: 44, 49; Yamskov 1991: 81-82). In any case, the Armenians were alarmed at this process, especially with reference to the Nakhjivan region, where by the 1980s, only two villages remained of the former substantial Armenian population (Lezov 1992). The Armenians simply interpreted this process as the intensive Turkification and genocide that had already caused the disappearance of the Kurdish community and reduced the populations of other ethnic minorities (Talysh, Tat, Persian) to insignificant numbers (Mirzoian 1988: 45-46).

Second, the Armenians cited the unfavorable economic picture in Karabagh. They complained about the industrial backwardness and marginalization of the region, the poor financial support, the injurious logging that was devastating virgin forests. For example, the NKAR produced more industrial goods than the Nakhjivan ASSR, but enjoyed less capital investment. True, except in rare cases, comparisons were made with the USSR in general rather than with Azerbaijan itself (Mirzoian 1988: 46-49, 53, 1989). Indeed, the general economic situation in Azerbaijan was no better and in some respects was even worse than in Karabagh (Yamskov 1991: 80). In terms of supplies of goods, natural environment, and living conditions, the NKAR was ahead of many other republic centers, and in many respects, the living standard was higher in the NKAR than in other regions of Azerbaijan. All of this was referred to many times by Azeri authors (Karaulov 1990: 251-252; Guliev 1989; Ismailov 1989d: 9-16; Altstadt 1992: 199). Yet, being more urbanized and better trained than the Azeris, the Armenians of the NKAR were also more demanding. Besides, as in Azerbaijan in general, the unbalanced development of viticulture forced out many other vital crops, and this had bad consequences at the time of the anti-alcoholism campaign of 1986, when the fragile economic balance was badly damaged (Mirzoian 1988: 47, 49, 53-54).

The same was true of the social environment, which was the third factor that irritated the Armenians. The problems were low incomes, poor medical care, lack of conveniences (gas supplies, running water), and under-development in the domestic sphere in general with respect to the rest of Azerbaijan (Mirzoian 1988: 50).

Fourth, the Armenians were dissatisfied with the official employment policy. Indeed, they recalled that a few decades previously, many Russians and Armenians had access to positions of authority in Azerbaijan. In the meantime, the situation had changed drastically, especially under Heydar Aliiev's rule. After he had reformed the bureaucratic structure, access to power for people of non-Azeri origin was almost entirely blocked (Swietochowski 1995: 183). The Armenians experienced discrimination in access to higher education, employment, and professional careers (Mirzoian 1988: 51).

Fifth, one of the key problems of the Karabagh Armenians was their cultural demands. They complained that they had to learn the history of Azerbaijan at school instead of the history of Armenia, even though both of these "histories" interpreted the same events quite differently. As we know, some Azeri authors made every effort to prove that the Armenians of Karabagh were in fact Armenized

Albanians rather than Armenians proper, and the Armenians were insulted by that. It was impossible to publish an Armenian version of history or watch Armenian TV programs in Karabagh. Visits by writers, actors, and musicians from Armenia to Karabagh were hampered. All of this was perceived by the Karabagh Armenians as an encroachment upon their identity and aroused their indignation (Mirzoian 1988: 50-51, 1989; Mkrtchian 1989; Dadamian 1989; Walker 1991: 116-117. For that, see Yamskov 1991: 81; Goldenberg 1994: 161).

Moreover, for years the idea that the first Armenians resettled to Karabagh only after the Russian-Iranian wars had been extensively disseminated by the Azeri mass media. Thus, the Azeris believed that the Armenians were newcomers who had no local roots and, thus no good grounds for any political claims. They were taught at school that the Armenians of Nagorny Karabagh were “guests” occupying “Azeri territories”. Any other views on this issue were out of question. As a result, quite naturally, the Azeris had no desire to acknowledge the Armenians’ claims and did not even see any good reason for them (Mirzoian 1988: 46; Ovanesian 1989; Oganjanian 1989). In fact, the Azeri historical perspective deprived the Armenians of the status of an “indigenous people”, and turned them into an ethnic minority. That, in the view of the Azeri authorities, provided their dreams of self-determination with no grounds (Khikmet 1992). It goes without saying that Armenian lawyers could not agree with that view (Barsegov 1997).

CHAPTER 14

THE NAKHJIVAN PASSIONS

The Nakhjivan ASSR, established in 1924 and then united with the Azerbaijan SSR, had a complicated history, as a result of both Armenian and Turkic activities. The Armenian regions of Nakhjivan and Gohtn in the Province of Vaspurakan, as well as part of historical Siunik, were situated there in the early medieval period. Thus, all that territory constituted the central part of what is called Greater Armenia by the Armenians. Armenian authors emphasized that this territory was one of those where the Armenian people had formed (Aivazian 1981: 4; Ulubabian 1979). Christianity was first adopted in Armenia in that territory in the 4th century A.D., and there Mesrob Mashtots had struggled against the pagans and founded the first schools with an Armenian language of instruction and an Armenian writing system. Later on, the region was conquered by the Arabs, and then by the Seljuqs. At a later time, the political role of Nakhjivan changed, because the Ildegizid Atabeqs made it the capital of their large state in the 12th century. Yet, the city still served as a large center of trade and crafts, where a substantial Armenian community lived. This period lasted until the turn of the 17th century, when the region suffered the highly destructive Ottoman-Persian wars, and the great bulk of the Armenian population was either exterminated or forcibly resettled in Persia. Later on, the Armenian population was reduced even more by other wars. As a result, by 1828, the Armenians accounted for only 15-20 percent of the local inhabitants.

After Russia annexed southern Transcaucasia, the region in question was flooded by Armenian refugees from Iran and the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian villages began to revive, and the share of Armenians in the Nakhjivan region increased to 41.2 percent by 1832. New drastic changes in the ethnic composition of the local population took place at the time of World War I, when some Armenians were exterminated and some fled to the north. Many of them never came back, and the proportion of Armenians in the population of the Nakhjivan ASSR was less than 11 percent in 1926. It is no wonder that 90 percent of the participants in a referendum held in 1921 voted to join Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, the process of pressing the Armenians out of the region did not stop with that: during the Soviet era, their population was in decline there, and was only 1.6 percent in 1979 (Khojabekian and Asatrian 1988).

This served as the background for a persistent trend that was manifested in Azeri scholarship. The last Soviet decades witnessed the "Turkification" of the

local past and attempts to force the Armenians out of the history of the southern part of Transcaucasia. A discussion of the cultural identity of some gravestones in a medieval graveyard in Urut village broke out in the 1980s, and was very instructive in this respect. Urut village is situated in the Sisian (former Zangezur) region of Armenia. A joint research project was carried out there by the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR and the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1961. 30 years later, the Azeri historian, M. S. Neimatova, published a book on the memorial monuments of Azerbaijan of the 12th – 19th centuries. This book included seventeen gravestones from the 15th – 16th centuries found in the Urut graveyard. Most of inscriptions discovered there were Arabic. However, two of them were related to the “Agvans” by Neimatova, who concluded that Turkification of the Albanian tribes had occurred in the territory of Siunik at that time (Neimatova 1981: 12, 22).

Armenian scholars immediately objected to that idea. First, they pointed out that Neimatova failed to acknowledge the distinct historical reality of the period in question⁶⁵). Indeed, according to historical documents, the fortress of Oront (contemporary Urut) was part of the estate of the Armenian Princes of the Orbelian family, who ruled in Siunik in pre-Mongol times and, to some extent even after the Mongol conquest. In the late 14th – 15th centuries, the Armenian nobility had found itself in a predominantly Muslim environment, and the object of intense Islamization. In the late 15th century, for example, the well-known Armenian noble family of Burtelian was converted to Islam. This process was represented at the Urut graveyard, where the gravestones still reminded one of the Armenian prototypes in their style, but were covered with inscriptions in Arabic script. Second, the Armenian researchers suggested their own reading of those inscriptions that attracted Neimatova so much. They clearly demonstrated that the carvers were less well trained in Arabic, and made many spelling mistakes. Nonetheless, it was still possible to read there the names of well-known Armenian families whose offspring had been converted to Islam. While suggesting a different interpretation of the inscriptions, Neimatova broke the methodological rules and referred to contemporary Azeri, whereas one should take into account the nature of Arabic in the 15th century. Besides, she did her best to impose the Armenian term “Agvan” upon the medieval “Albanians” as though that was their own self-designation. That was entirely unacceptable. Third, the Armenian authors put Neimatova’s attempt to reveal the Islamization of the Albanians in Siunik into a broader context. They cited the aforementioned Azeri view, which unreasonably included medieval Siunik in Caucasian Albania (Papazian 1983, 1987; Khachatrian 1987: 7, 18-19, 68-69, 176-177, 1989: 159-160. See also Bedrosian 1997: 270).

In response to her Armenian opponents, Neimatova reproduced Buniatov’s ideas about the Albanian population of medieval Siunik up to the 10th century, a distinct “Siunik language”, the Turkification (Azerbaijanization) of the local Albanians long before Islam had been introduced there, the gravitation of the Siunik

Church to the Albanian Church. She recognized that Siunik was ruled by the Armenian Orbelian family for some time, but maintained that the noble Albanian families could live side by side with them. Once again she emphasized strict connections between the Urut graveyard and the Turkic-speaking tribes, and refused to acknowledge that any Islamized Armenian aristocrats might be buried there. Finally, she stressed the unique nature of her “discovery”. She believed that she had managed to trace in Urut the only doubtless evidence of the Turkification and Islamization of the Albanian tribes (Neimatova 1985; Buniatov, Neimatova 1988: 108-110). Unfortunately, all these declarations proved to be poorly based and were unable to compete with more persuasive Armenian views.

Thus, in the 1970s – 1980s, the Armenian and Azeri views of the early and medieval past of Nakhjivan and Siunik were quite different, if not opposite. It is sufficient to compare two books focused on the architectural monuments of the Nakhjivan ASSR. The authors’ intentions were manifested by the very titles of their works. The study by the Armenian author discussed the Armenian architecture of the region (Aivazian 1981), and the book by his Azeri counterparts dealt with the “Nakhjivan School of Azerbaijan Architecture” (Salamzade, Mamedzade 1985). The same historical towns, architectural groups and particular monuments were displayed and interpreted by them quite differently, especially as concerned their ethnic affiliation. Where the Armenian author found Armenian towns, graveyards and monasteries, his Azeri colleagues identified all these historical monuments indiscriminately with the “Nakhjivan School of Azerbaijan Architecture” and failed to mention the Armenians and their cultural heritage. One example was their discussion of the well-known Armenian medieval town of Old Juga, which had a large graveyard that was once covered by thousands of Armenian khachkars⁶⁶). Another was the city of Nakhjivan itself, which was most often identified as the capital of the Ildegizid Atabeqs in the 12th century by the Azeri authors, and was called one of the most important Armenian medieval cities by the Armenian scholar. Third, the town of Ordubad, in the Azeri view, was founded in the 15th century and flourished in the 17th – 18th centuries, whereas, in fact, the town turned out to have already been an important center in pre-Christian times and was known later on for its numerous 10th – 17th century Armenian churches and monasteries. One of the churches, from the 13th century, survives to the present day.

The Azeri authors described the site of Vanand as the place where the “Volga Bulgars” (? V. Sh.) lived from the 2nd century B.C. At the same time, from the Armenian point of view, this village was well known from the 1st century B.C. as being associated with the introduction of Christianity to Armenia and with the heroic deeds of Vagan Gohtnetsi (8th century), who did not give up his loyalty to Armenia even on pain of death. A not very knowledgeable researcher might be puzzled by references to some important historical monuments, for they had entirely different names in the Armenian and Azeri traditions. For example, the fortress that is called Alinjakala by the Azeris is known as Yernjak by the Armenians, and the Armenian author did not fail to remark that the “foreign

invaders called it Alinja". The Azeri authors associated it with the Atabeqs' activities and pointed out its old Turkic name, whereas, for the Armenians, it represented "one of the earliest Armenian settlements, one of the most famous residences of the Armenian Princes", where the Princes of Orbelian had lived.

The list of this type of differences might be extended, but it is already clear to what a major extent the ethnocentric approach distorted the historical picture. This was more true for the Azeri school, which targeted only the Albanian and Azeri historical heritage and did its best to cleanse the history of Azerbaijan of any Armenian traces. The Armenian scholars respected the Azeri patriotic attitude, which caused the Azeri researches to focus on chiefly Muslim or Turkic monuments. However, the Armenians negatively perceived the systematic neglect of the Armenian heritage (for example, see Aivazian 1981: 5). It reinforced their suspicions about what they called "pan-Turkism".

CHAPTER 15

HISTORY AND INTENSE POLITICS

Whereas alarms over the threat of “pan-Turkism” and the “Greater Turan” idea rose quickly among the Armenians at the turn of the 1980s⁶⁷), the Azeris were also anxious about some rumored plans for the development of a “Greater Armenia” (for example, see Yusufzade 1991). The situation was even more aggravated by the growth of anti-Armenian propaganda in southern Russia in the early 1990s. Among other leaflets, counterfeit documents were disseminated there that declared the establishment of some Armenian national-liberation front of the northern Caucasus, aimed at the unification of the northern Caucasian territories with Armenia. Simultaneously, another forgery was issued called an “Historical Overview”. It was made to look as though it had been published in Stepanakert in 1992 by F. Shelov-Kovediaev, an activist in the Democratic Russia movement, who was an officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation at that time. Armenian rights to claim the southern territories of Russia were justified by this pamphlet, by referring to purported archaeological evidence and historical documents. Actually, the false nature of this document is demonstrated by the fact that this sort of evidence was absolutely nonexistent; even the Armenian radical revisionists had never gone that far.

Yet, all of these documents were said to be authentic by certain Russian nationalists. In response, the patriotic Moscow newspaper, “Sovietskaia Rossiia”, immediately published an angry letter by the well-known philosopher, Edward Volodin, one of the ideologists of the Russian nationalist movement, who accused the Armenians of making an attempt to seize a substantial piece of the “genuinely Russian lands” and, thus to commence the final breakdown of Russia. He also blamed the democrats, as though they supported this anti-Russian attitude (Volodin 1992). In his response to this attack, Shelov-Kovediaev dissociated himself from the “Historical Overview” Volodin referred to and provided indirect evidence that this sort of fake might have been fabricated in Baku (Shelov-Kovediaev 1993). Indeed, one could find a hint in Buniatov’s publications that members of the Armenian Diaspora might “want to establish their autonomy somewhere in the Krasnodar or Stavropol’ region of Russia” and that the Armenians were dreaming of the establishment of “Greater Armenia” between the Black, Mediterranean and Caspian Seas (Buniatov 1989: 4, 1990a: 9, 356). It is instructive that the same idea of the restless Armenians’ aspiration to establish “Greater Armenia” and of their

encroachment upon the original Azeri lands was reproduced by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliev in his recent messages to the general public (for example, see Aliev 1999a). Indeed, these sorts of aspirations were manifested by the declarations of the so-called "Armenian national liberation front of the northern Caucasus". In order to confirm these plans, the Azeri authors usually referred to the Russian journalist, Velichko's, anti-Armenian publications from the very early 20th century (for example, see Yusufzade 1991).

The Russian Armenian community was indignant at the sharp growth of anti-Armenian propaganda in southern Russia, which was represented by the aforementioned materials. The Armenian community provided additional evidence that the source of all this propaganda was in Baku. One piece of evidence was a letter published by the newspaper, "Sovietskaia Rossiia", as though it had come from the Russian community in Baku. The letter warned the Russians of the "Armenian threat", as though the Armenians were planning to establish "Greater Armenia" and play off the Muslims against the Christians (Zotov, Soloviev 1992). The propaganda achieved its goals, and the Armenians, together with other Caucasians, were several times attacked by Russian Cossacks in the Krasnodar region in the fall of 1992 (Ter-Sarkisants, Khudaverdian 1993: 24-34; Ter-Sarkisants 1998: 357-358).

In the meantime, the serious territorial conflict with Armenia made the Azerbaijan authorities refer to the distant past even more persistently, in order to legitimize the territorial integrity of Republic of Azerbaijan. It appeared that, from January 1998, the history of the Azeri people would be employed as a powerful political weapon by the President of Azerbaijan himself. In a speech given at the meeting of the Constitutional Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan on January 14, 1998, Heydar Aliev said: "The historical lands of Azerbaijan have to be restored. Our people have to know precisely which lands constitute our own historical lands, which lands we have lost, why have we lost them; they have to be given back without any question. If we fail to get them, future generations will do it" (Aliev 1998a). In March that year, President Aliev signed a decree making March 31 the day of the genocide of the Azeri people. In this decree, the Russian-Iranian peace treaties of 1813 and 1828 were associated with the beginning of the "dismemberment of the Azeri people, the redistribution of our historical lands" (a period of time was referred to when East Caucasian Turks had no idea of any "Azeri people", and the term itself had not yet been coined. V. Sh.). The decree read that these treaties had caused massive Armenian migration into the territory of the Yerevan, Nakhjivan and Karabagh Khanates, where earlier the Azeris had lived. Having settled there, the Armenians were occupied with keeping down the local Azeri people and implementing their plans to build up "Greater Armenia". In order to legitimize that, they began to fabricate a falsified history of the Armenian people. The decree extensively used such terms as "occupation", "conquerors", "criminal plans", "intellectual aggression", "genocide", and the like. The Armenians were accused of the appropriation of the historical and cultural heritage of the Azeri

people. Finally, the decree ascribed to them some plans for the physical extermination of the Azeri people and the seizure of their territories (Aliev 1998b).

Heydar Aliev promulgated all these ideas on an international level at the time of his visit to Ankara in order to take part in the celebration of 75th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey. In his speech before the Turkish public on October 30, 1998, Aliev not only assured the audience of his pan-Turkic orientation and of the special relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey, but he also accused the Armenians of “endless crimes against Turkey and Azerbaijan”. He went so far as to maintain that the Armenians had arranged the genocide of the Turkish people, rather than vice-versa (Aliev 1998c)⁶⁸.

The leader of Azerbaijan took a new step on the path to the revision of the Transcaucasian past at the international “Islamic Civilization in the Caucasus” symposium held in Baku in December 1998. On December 11, Heydar Aliev made a speech before a group of participants. At that time, he called Armenia “western Azerbaijan”, the “place where Azeris and Muslims had lived” from the old days (Bakinsky rabochii, December 15, 1998). It seemed as though the President had already found out “which lands constitute our own historical lands”. This idea filled the President’s mind and he went back to the issue again and again (for that, see Stupishin 1999: 8).

The celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Nakhjivan Autonomous Region made a new pretext for an anti-Armenian campaign. President Aliev devoted several speeches and decrees to this important event in the history of his native Nakhjivan. He not only referred to historical grounds why Nakhjivan should be an integral part of Azerbaijan, but went much further and called for the revision of the history of Transcaucasia from a pan-Turkic viewpoint. He maintained that a “deliberate” disclaimer of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of the “Irevan region” in favor of Armenia in 1918 was an act of the Azeri generosity. He called the territory of contemporary Armenia the Azeri land and encouraged Azeri historians to “create well-confirmed documents” and to “prove that the territory of contemporary Armenia constitutes lands that belong to Azerbaijan” (Aliev 1999a; 1999b).

A meeting of the State Committee for the Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Nakhjivan Autonomous Region was held on February 9, 1999, under the chairmanship of Heydar Aliev (Zasedanie 1999). It was of special interest for those interested in the most recent trends in the field of the study of Azerbaijani history. While opening the meeting, the President called for the truthful representation of the history of Azerbaijan and emphasized the political importance of the jubilee. Manifesting his understanding of the “truthful representation of history”, the President stated once again that in 1918-1919 the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic voluntarily let Armenia have the right to the Yerevan Khanate and the city of Yerevan (Aliev 1999c). It is worth noting that no Yerevan Khanate survived until that time; instead, there was a Yerevan Province, where the Armenians made up the bulk of the population. As we have already seen, there was a territorial dispute

between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1918-1919 but it had nothing to do with Yerevan Province, let alone Yerevan.

The members of the committee immediately picked up their President, and some of them went even further. The chairman of the Supreme Majles of the Nakhjivan Autonomous Region, V. Talybov, called the Armenians the “historical enemies” of the Azeri people. The director of the Museum of History of Azerbaijan, N. Velikhanly (Velikhanova), promised to disprove the assertion by Russian and Armenian authors that Nakhjivan was an Armenian land. A researcher from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, M. Neimatova, already known to us, stated that she had already refuted the Armenian claims to Zangezur, proving that the Muslims had lived there in the medieval period (and we know how she did that). The deputy director of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, M. Ismailov, maintained that the Armenians accounted for an insignificant share of the population of the Yerevan Khanate in the late 18th century, and “our Turkic, Azerbaijani state” flourished in that territory even earlier. At the same time, he did his best to demonstrate that in fact the Armenians had not had any important state after Armenia had been partitioned in the end of the 4th century, and that contemporary Armenia was built out of genuinely Azeri lands. This was not the end of the story. The chairman of the Department of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, the archaeologist V. Aliev, stated that he had managed to prove that “from the very beginning of humanity and to the present day, Nakhjivan was the main center of culture in Azerbaijan”. He called for the celebration of the 3,500th anniversary of Nakhjivan. He maintained that since the Urartian period, “Nakhjivan was in the rear sights of the Armenians”, and complained that the aggressors of Urartu (supposedly the Armenians! V. Sh.) “had occupied the western territories of Azerbaijan”. It seems that he believed that the Azeris lived in Transcaucasia from time immemorial, and the “Armenian aggressors” made every effort to force them out, beginning from the Urartian period at the very least.

Thus, the participants of the meeting were seemingly competing with each other to see who would be able to fulfil better and faster the President’s instruction to demonstrate to the international community that the “Azeri people enjoyed an old culture, and had a long history in their own state”. This message in the President’s decree was very much appreciated by the Minister of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, M. Mardanov. He emphasized the important role of this instruction in the education of youth, for the “formation of the Azerbaijaniness that made up the core of our national ideology”. He called Nakhjivan a “very old and originally Azeri land”, although, as is well known to specialists, the very name Nakhjivan derived from the Chechen root “Nakh”, “Nakhji”.

The celebration of the Nakhjivan jubilee turned to be a good reason for the revision of the Transcaucasian history to be not only approved by the President of Azerbaijan but even ordered by him. Azeri scholars began to fulfil their task

immediately. As early as February 1999, a solemn meeting of the State Committee was held, devoted to one more jubilee, this time the 1,300th anniversary of the dastan (epic), "Kitabi-dede Gorgud", the original version of which was written in Farsi. Azeri scholars believed this epic to be part of the "early Turkic Azeri culture" (Djamshidov 1991). The President of Nakhjivan University, I. Gabibbeili, argued that this epic was extremely old; so old that it had influenced Homer's "Odyssey". In his view, this very "fact" was clear evidence of the very long history of the Azeri people who composed this epic. Moreover, he managed to find the place names mentioned by the epic in territories in Iran, Turkey and Armenia. In his mouth, that meant that the contemporary Armenian state was situated on the former lands of Azerbaijan (Gabibbeili 1999). Similar views are shared by the Azeri community in Moscow. Recently, the Academician A. Dashdamirov, the former secretary of ideology of the Azerbaijan Communist Party and today professor of the Russian Academy of the State Service, called Karabagh the sacred region of the Azeri people, "one of the main centers of the Azeri people's ethnogenesis" (Dashdamirov 2001). To put it other way, in this interpretation, Transcaucasia belonged to the Turks throughout all time (for that, see Stupishin 1999: 8).

Thus, the struggle between Azerbaijan and Armenia for the territory between the Kura and Arax Rivers turned out to be closely connected with the identity of the local population. And, as we know already, the Armenians and the Azeris shaped their identity in a different way: the former base theirs on linguistic loyalty most of all, and the latter emphasize both territory and state. That is why, in order to prove their claims to the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers it is sufficient for the Armenians to refer to the long development of both the Armenian language and Armenian literary tradition in the region. This is not a difficult task to do, providing there are many medieval monuments with Armenian inscriptions. This way of reasoning is inaccessible to the Azeris, because there are no traces of Turkic of the same antiquity in Transcaucasia. Biological continuity provides them with more fascinating perspectives for, in this way, they are able to relate their distant ancestors to the earliest inhabitants of the region, whom they identify with the Caucasian Albanian tribes. Although the natives of Caucasian Albania spoke languages closely related to those of the northeast Caucasian population (nowadays they are represented by the Lezghin, Avar, Dargin, Chechen and some other languages) having nothing to do with Turkic, the Azeri authors are not embarrassed by that. Well, they agree, language replacement was a common phenomenon in the region, but the local inhabitants continued to retain their original biological heritage, they continued to occupy their original territories and develop their own culture.

Yet it is impossible to construct any clear-cut territorial boundaries during a time that precedes the development of states, and the Azeri authors very much

appreciate the issue of state formation in the territory of eastern Transcaucasia. They achieve several goals with this strategy. First, regardless of the ethnic diversity that was very characteristic of the local medieval states, the Azeri authors identify local inhabitants after the states they lived in. At the same time, they associate the states with the ruling dynasties, which turn out to be Turkic in origin, whatever official languages were used at court. Second, medieval statehood accepted various types of subordination, from rigid subjection to loose tribute relationships. This permitted the artificial extension of borders and placing of claims on the territories of contemporary neighbors. Third, the continuous state tradition from the earliest times provides grounds for self-identification with the state's people, bearers of civilization. This is considered more important by the Azeris, the more their neighbors, the Georgians and Armenians, treat them as the descendants of recent nomads who brought about destruction rather than any creative activity. Hence comes their aspiration to make the Kingdom of Caucasian Albania as old as the neighboring Iberian and Armenian states. Fourth, the great antiquity of Caucasian Albania serves as very important argument in the territorial dispute. Indeed, by referring to historical documents, Armenian authors prove that the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers were an integral part of the Armenian Kingdom long before a state was established in Caucasian Albania. Their Azeri counterparts lack this sort of irrefutable evidence. That is why they tie their prospects to archaeology and believe that it will help them to resolve the problem of the contested territories to their own benefit.

Finally, one more argument, which is used to their advantage by the Azeri authors, deals with the local self-awareness of the native inhabitants of the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers. As we know, in order to secure their political sovereignty against the Armenian Bagratids' encroachments, the local princes deliberately cultivated Albanian self-awareness, of which an obvious manifestation was the "History of the Albanians". Further on, this distinct self-awareness was encouraged even more by the local Albanian Church, centered in Gandzasar. Making no distinction between this religious identity on the one hand, and ethnic and state self-awareness on the other hand, Azeri authors do their best to isolate the local inhabitants from the Armenian people. On their side, the Armenian authors remark quite correctly that religious identity should be carefully distinguished from ethnic identity. At the same time, both parties avoid discussing the painful point that religious loyalty is able to shape ethnic identity. In a particular environment, either of them might provide the grounds for the formation of a distinct ethnic group embracing all the Nagorny Karabagh Armenians. This possibility seems all the more real, in that today Nagorny Karabagh has enjoyed *de facto* sovereignty for more than a decade, and there is no doubt that this encourages the growth of local self-awareness.

It goes without saying that the given political situation does not satisfy the Azeris, who feel that they were treated unfairly. Being unable to regain their lost lands by force of arms, the Azeri authorities do their best to substantiate the

territorial integrity of the republic. Traces of a former Armenian presence in the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan cannot but provoke Azeris' negative feelings. Here historians, archaeologists, ethnologists and linguists are able to help them; and the scholars make great efforts in order, first, to discover the early roots of the Azeris in the territory of Azerbaijan, and second, to cleanse the latter of any Armenian heritage. All this activity is not only appreciated by the local authorities but, as we saw, is approved by the President of Azerbaijan.

The authorities of the Republic of Armenia carry out a more careful policy. They avoid manifesting any territorial claims to the lands of Azerbaijan. They were unwilling to be the first state to recognize the sovereignty of Nagorny Karabagh, in order to avoid accusations of intervention in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan or, even worse, to seem to be making an attempt to annex the lands of the neighboring republic. Moreover, independent Armenia made serious efforts to improve its relationship with Turkey (Croissant 1998: 70-71). Those Armenian historians and writers who wage an ideological struggle for contested territories act on their own behalf and receive no official support from the Armenian authorities. Thus, the Armenian authorities are making every effort to eradicate the anti-Turkic attitude, which still prevails among the general public.

Part II

THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 1

A REPUBLIC WITH RESTRICTED SOVEREIGNTY

From the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s, many administrative formations had managed to upgrade their political status in the USSR. Yet, there were republics and provinces whose status was permanently reduced (for example, see Menteshashvili 1990: 62). One of them was Abkhazia.

It is no accident that Abkhazia is called the pearl of the Black Sea region. Occupying the northern part of the Colchis lowlands, Abkhazia is well known first for its mild climate. Second, it is situated at the crossing of trade routes and cultural interactions. Third, it is very rich in precious subtropical fruits and medicinal plants. Fourth, it is famous for opportunities for recreational activities and, at the same time, is an important military-strategic bridge between Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and Transcaucasia and Asia Minor, on the other. From early times, the indigenous population of Abkhazia was made up of the Abkhazians, who were related in terms of language to the Adyghe of the northwestern Caucasus. The Abkhazian and the Adyghe languages constitute a branch of the distinct North Caucasian family of languages, which is unrelated to the Kartvelian (South Caucasian) family of languages, of which Georgian is a member.

The Mingrelians live south of the Abkhazians. Their language is a special branch of the Kartvelian family of languages and is different from Georgian proper in many respects. Until the very end of the 1920s, the authenticity of the Mingrelians and their language was officially recognized, their population numbers were recorded in the national census, and a number of publications were issued in Mingrelian. In 1931-1935, a newspaper was published in Mingrelian. Moreover, there were some plans to establish Mingrelian autonomy in 1925, and even at the very end of the 1920s (Shengelaia 1991: 78; Marykhuba 1994b: 57-58). Yet, this development was soon terminated, and the Mingrelians together with the Svans and Ajars were recorded as Georgians in the national census of 1939 (Marykhuba 1994b: 58). Moreover, their distinct history, historical sites and territories began to be appropriated by Georgian historians. For example, while identifying the legendary Colchians with the Laz (Mingrelian-Chans), and the latter with the “early Georgians”, Georgian historians, as we will see later on, viewed the classical Greek myth of the Argonauts as part of the priceless Georgian historical heritage (Hewitt 1993: 268, 317, note 9, 1995a, 1995b: 52-53; Goldenberg 1994: 85-86).

The mighty states struggled with each other for possession of Abkhazia for

centuries – Byzantium, Persia, the Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire and Russia took part in this dispute. Georgia laid its claim to Abkhazia as well, but it was more often than not involved in internal strife. During most of the medieval period, it consisted of separate kingdoms or principalities that united but for short periods and then soon broke apart. Abkhazia was one of those polities that was only an integral part of the united Georgian-Abkhazian state in the 10th – 13th centuries. Later on, Abkhazia was either in an alliance with neighboring principalities, or was in fact subordinated for periods, or was developing quite independently.

Beginning in the 16th century, Western Georgia, including Abkhazia, was increasingly more affected by the Ottoman Empire. True, the Abkhazian Shervashidze (Chachba) Dynasty still managed to hang on to its rule. By the turn of the 19th century, Islam was rather popular in Abkhazia, and the country was politically and culturally oriented towards the Ottoman Empire, in contrast to many other Georgian principalities. In the meantime, the Russian-Ottoman confrontation of the late 18th – early 19th century concluded with Russian victory, and a substantial part of Transcaucasia joined the Russian Empire. It is interesting to note that Georgia was integrated by Russia as several separate principalities rather than as a consolidated political body. Abkhazia was one of the last polities to join Russia, which it did in 1810 (Suny 1988: 64; Hewitt 1993: 270-271; Colarusso 1995: 77). Over the next half a century, it enjoyed being ruled by its own titled prince. However, after some Abkhazian tribes took part in the unsuccessful anti-colonial war of the Caucasian highlanders against Russian power, Abkhazia lost its autonomous status. It was reorganized in 1864 into a distinct “Sukhum Military Department” (“District”, after 1883) within the Kutaisi Military Province. After that, for more than half a century, Abkhazia was run by Russian officials and lost its very name. Its name was restored in 1918, however (Lakoba 1990a: 7, 32). Meanwhile, Russian secular and religious authorities did their best to convert the Abkhazians to Russian Orthodox Christianity and to Russify them entirely. To achieve this goal, the city of Gagra with its surroundings was included in the Sochi region of the Black Sea Province between 1904 and 1917 (Lakoba 1998a: 87). Some Abkhazian intellectuals attempted to resist this development, and in 1916, they required the Russian authorities to transform the whole Sukhum District to a distinct Sukhum Province, or at least to unite it with Kutaisi Province¹).

National awakening commenced in Abkhazia in 1910-1917, when, on the one hand, local intellectuals began to call for it, and on the other hand, the Abkhazians felt great self-esteem because the Abkhazian cavalry detachment had become famous for its heroic deeds during World War I. The February Revolution of 1917 finally awakened the Abkhazians to an active political life. A Committee for Public Security was established in Sukhum on March 10, 1917, which declared itself a local body of the Russian Provisional Government. The Committee was headed by the Abkhazian Prince, A. Shervashidze. During the time of political crisis and anarchy in the fall 1917, the Abkhazians wanted first to align themselves with some form of a regional federal state. With that idea in mind, they took part in the signing

of the "Union Treaty" and the establishment of the Southeastern Union of Cossack Forces, Caucasian Highlanders and Free Peoples of the Steppe on October 20, 1917. As a result, the United Government of the Southeastern Union was established in Yekaterinodar (Lakoba 1990a: 60-62; Lakoba 1993: 281).

Simultaneously, the Congress of the Abkhazian People was held in Sukhum on November 8, 1917, through the initiative of the local socialists (Men'shevik). The Abkhazian People's Soviet (APS) was established, headed by Simon Basaria, a well known Abkhazian political activist, an advocate of the political and cultural rights of the Caucasian Highlanders²). The Congress adopted the Declaration of the Congress of the Abkhazian People and the Constitution of the Abkhazian People's Soviet. Both documents emphasized the cultural authenticity of the Abkhazian people and their distinct history, and manifested the Abkhazian people's aspiration for political self-determination. The discussion of the form of the proclaimed self-determination was delayed until the Constituent Assembly of the Peoples of Russia could be held. At the same time, close relationships with the North Caucasian Highlanders were stressed as a political priority³), and Georgia was hardly mentioned in those documents at all. The APS was declared a "national political organization, uniting all the Abkhazian people". Simultaneously, the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities was proclaimed (Basaria 1923: 86-89).

Only at the beginning of 1918 did the APS take steps towards the adjustment of its relationships with Georgia. It signed an agreement with the National Soviet of Georgia on February 9, which stated that Georgia recognized an integrated Abkhazia within its borders, between the Inguri and Mzymta Rivers. Yet, the issue of the political arrangement of Abkhazia was left open. In accordance with their Congress' decision, the Abkhazians claimed political independence, whereas the Georgians had offered them the autonomous status of Abkhazia within the Georgian republic. True, the Georgians agreed to recognize the principle of national self-determination (Menteshashvili 1990: 11; Lakoba 1993: 285; Hewitt 1993: 278).

In the spring of 1918, Abkhazia witnessed two Bolshevik coups, the arrival of the Transcaucasia Federation's troops in Sukhum, and, finally, the proclamation of the Georgian Democratic Republic on May 26. In response to the latter, on June 2, the APS stated that all previous agreements with Georgia had lost their legal basis, and declared itself the only organ of political power in Abkhazia. Still, it expressed its desire for help from Georgia in organizing local power structures. On June 8-11, the Georgian oriented APS delegation signed a treaty with Georgia by which Abkhazia joined Georgia as an autonomous body and received financial support. Georgia was granted the right to send a military detachment to introduce order to Abkhazia. Yet, the Congress of all the Population of Abkhazia had to make the final decision on the form of government in the region (Menteshashvili 1990: 15-16; Hewitt 1993: 279)⁴).

Under the pretext of the struggle against the Bolsheviks, the entire seacoast from Sukhum to Tuapse was occupied in late June – July by Georgian troops headed by General Mazniev (Mazniashvili) who, in violation of the previous treaty,

was appointed General Governor of Abkhazia. In response, some APS members recruited a group of the Abkhazian maxadzhirians in Turkey and landed in the Kodor area of Abkhazia. The Georgian forces successfully beat off this attack (Lakoba 1993: 296-301, 2001a; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 77-78). Being suspicious of the local Abkhazian inhabitants' sympathies with Turkey, the Georgian troops arranged a massacre in the Kodor area in August 1918, and introduced restrictions on the free movement of Abkhazians in some areas of Abkhazia (Basaria 1923: 94-96, 1984: 16). The Georgian authorities attempted to hold an inquiry into the case but without any visible results (Menteshashvili 1990: 24-25). In the meantime, Georgian was officially introduced as the only language of the local bureaucracy, and the Abkhazian alphabet was abolished as the "invention of Russian officials". Everything was done in order to implement the instruction of the Georgian leader, Noy Zhordania, in the "Georgianization of the Abkhazians" (Sagaria 1989a, 1989b; Marykhuba 1994b: 18; Lakoba 2001a)⁵. Because of these developments, the Congress of the Population of Abkhazia, which was obliged to discuss the issue of the political organization of Abkhazia, was delayed for an indefinite period. In August 1918, the APS declared its dissolution, stating it was in protest against the brutal actions of Georgia (Basaria 1923: 91-92). In fact, however, it was broken up because of being accused of Turkophilic attitudes (Lakoba 1993: 301, 2001a)⁶.

Yet, the new APS, dominated by ethnic Georgians, turned out to be no more obedient. It appealed to the commander of the Volunteer Army, General M. S. Alexeev, requesting help to cleanse Abkhazia of Georgian troops. To resolve the issue, a conference was held at General Alexeev's headquarters on September 12-13, with participation by the representatives of the Georgian Republic, Kuban' Province government, and the Volunteer Army. Since they disagreed on all the points, the opposite sides were not able to reach a compromise. Soon thereafter, the Kuban' representative, Nikolai Vorobiev, published a pamphlet (Vorobiev 1990) which argued that Russia had more reasons to own Abkhazia than Georgia did⁷. Later on, we will see that, for years, the Georgian historians did their best to disprove the main arguments of this pamphlet.

In the beginning of October, the Georgian authorities broke up the disloyal APS once again, accusing it of plotting to break away from Georgia. After that, Abkhazia witnessed a wave of mass arrests. Not only some former APS leaders, but also many well educated Abkhazians and renowned elders were put onto jail (Basaria 1923: 93). The Georgian arguments for this campaign were illogical: on the one hand, these people were accused of having sympathy with landlords as well as being loyal to Russia; on the other hand, they were suspected of being Bolsheviks and Turkophiles (Menteshashvili 1990: 22-23, 25-26; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 85).

The Volunteer Army and the Georgian Republic were still contesting Abkhazia in early 1919. A new commander-in-chief, General A. Denikin, demanded that Georgian troops and administrators be removed from Abkhazia. The Georgian authorities kept promising "broad autonomy" for Abkhazia, for, as Georgian

Minister of Internal Affairs, N. Ramishvili, claimed, the Abkhazian people were not ready for independence. As a result, democratic elections were held in Abkhazia, and the new People's Soviet of Abkhazia (PSA) was established in March 1919, dominated by the Georgian Mensheviks. On March 20, they passed their "Decree of the Abkhazian Autonomy" within the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This plan was welcomed by the deputies of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. The latter worried about the strong anti-Georgian attitude in Abkhazia, where the great bulk of the population spoke Russian. They feared, first, an uprising if Abkhazia were denied political autonomy, and second an alliance with the Volunteer Army if it were granted independence. Thus, the decision for autonomy was an involuntary one; that is why, despite the Georgian leaders' many declarations (including those made at the international meetings), the implementation of the decision was delayed by every means (Lakoba 1990a: 74-77; Menteshashvili 1990: 40-41, 46-49, 50-52).

Instead, mass resettlement of Georgian peasants to Abkhazia was encouraged by the Georgian authorities, who allocated them former state and private plots of land. At the same time, the PSA was planning another future for those lands: the Abkhazians were dreaming of the repatriation of tens of thousands of maxadzhirians who had been forced to flee to Turkey in the 1860s – 1870s. Yet, while the appeal of the maxadzhirians was circulating in Georgian bureaucratic offices, Abkhazia was being populated by Georgian peasants (Basaria 1923: 83-85; Menteshashvili 1990: 41-42; Lakoba 1990a: 78).

Simultaneously, the dispute between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Church for the Abkhazians continued. Whereas the former had enjoyed an apparently advantageous position before the revolution, an initiative was taken by the latter under the Georgian Republic to establish the eparchy of the Georgian catholicosate in Abkhazia for the first time in centuries⁸). The relationships between both Churches were by no means friendly (Menteshashvili 1990: 7, 43-46; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 62-63, 66-67, 94-97).

In December 1920, the PSA delegation visited Tbilisi to negotiate with the representatives of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. The Abkhazian delegates were shocked when they figured out that the Assembly had decided to resolve the issue of Abkhazian autonomy and to draw up a constitution for Abkhazia without discussing the matter with the Abkhazians themselves. Only after a protest had been lodged by the PSA did the Constitutional Committee commence drawing up a draft of the statement of Abkhazian autonomy. Under Article 107 of the new Constitution of Georgia, Abkhazia was named the "Sukhumi Province" and an inseparable part of Georgia. Its borders were established between the Inguri and Mekhadyr Rivers. The PSA was invested with the management of internal affairs in Abkhazia, and Georgian was declared the state language there, although the PSA was granted the right to introduce any local language as the language of instruction in school and for bureaucratic procedures. This quite contradictory draft was approved by the Constituent Assembly of Georgia on February 21, 1921, but it was already too late. The days were numbered until the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia

(Menteshashvili 1990: 47-49; B. Pipiia 1995: 215; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 108-110, 112; Lakoba 1993: 319-320; Lakoba 1998b: 92).

The excesses of the Georgian military in Abkhazia, the seizure of lands by the Georgian peasants, red tape concerning the issue of autonomy, the granting of Abkhazia with only restricted constitutional rights, the aspirations of Georgia's democratic leaders for the Georgianization of Abkhazia (for that, see Sagaria 1990a, 1990b), all ensured the Soviet power extensive support in Abkhazia. In the views of an Abkhazian scholar, the Abkhazians perceived the arrival of the Red Army in Sukhum on March 4, 1921, as their liberation from a regime of occupation. The declaration of the independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia on March 31, 1921 met no less enthusiasm among the Abkhazians. The Abkhazian Bolsheviks claimed Abkhazian independence from Georgia, and in order to achieve that goal were even ready for Abkhazia to be taken into the Russian Federation. Moreover, while hoping to be granted independent status, they provided Soviet Russia with invaluable help in the arrangement of its successful negotiations with Turkey. All of this was their response to democratic Georgia's policies, which were met with discontent by all the inhabitants of Abkhazia, not by the ethnic Abkhazians alone (Lakoba 1990a: 79-83, 85, 1993: 320-322, 2001a; Hewitt 1993: 281)⁹.

In the spring of 1921, several meetings were held, with the participation of both the Abkhazian and Georgian Bolsheviks, who approved the decision for the establishment of the independent Abkhazian SSR, and the issue of its future unification with either the Russian Federation or Georgia was left open for the Congresses of the Soviets of Abkhazia and Georgia to decide. On May 28, the First Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazian Workers was held, which approved the decision for the independence of Abkhazia, and also manifested its aspiration for an alliance with other Soviet Republics. Yet, in practical terms, many members of the Caucasian Bureau of the RCP(b) as well as some members of the Local Bureau of the RCP(b) of Abkhazia believed that Abkhazia was not ready for economic independence, and that is why it had to make a close alliance with neighboring Georgia. The People's Commissar for Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, shared this approach, in particular. He not only claimed that "Abkhazia was an autonomous part of independent Georgia" but also put further financial pressure on it. As a result, Georgia and Abkhazia signed the Union treaty in December 1921, which was approved by the Congresses of Soviets of both Abkhazia and Georgia the next year. In the Constitution adopted by the Third All-Abkhazian Congress of Soviets in April 1925, the SSR Abkhazia was demoted to a Treaty Republic, i.e. it was declared a sovereign state, but strictly connected with Georgia. At the same time, Russian was granted state status, which, in fact, endorsed the existing situation. In 1926-1927, both Georgia and Abkhazia adopted new Constitutions, which provided their treaty relationships with legal status. These relationships lasted until February 1931, when the status of Abkhazia was reduced once again. A decision was made to reorganize it into an Autonomous SSR within the Georgian SSR. In 1937, Abkhazia lost its state symbols, and had to use the Georgian crest and banner (Menteshashvili

1990: 56-63; Lakoba 1990a: 83-84, 2001a; Dzapshba 1996: 48-52; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 117-126; Lakoba 1998b: 93-95).

At the same time, the reduction of political status did not affect the real situation in Abkhazia very much, until the death of the head of the Abkhazian government, Nestor Lakoba, in December 1936. Due to Lakoba's fairly flexible politics and his friendship with Stalin, Abkhazia avoided mass repression and enforced collectivization, enjoyed some measure of sovereignty, and maintained its cultural landscape until the late 1930s. Moreover, in order to secure this situation, Lakoba placed before Stalin the issue of the incorporation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation several times (Lakoba 1990a: 110-126; Danilov 1990: 10-12).

Yet, Lakoba's plans never came to fruition. Abkhazia began to experience pressure while he was still alive. For example, uniform license plates with the label "Georgia" were introduced on all the cars under Beria's initiative in 1935. That was taken as a bad omen by the Abkhazians (Lakoba 1990a: 124). Radical changes came after 1936, and contemporary Abkhazian authors treated the period between 1937 and 1953 as the time of the de facto abolition of the Abkhazian SSR and the establishment of a regime of Georgian occupation (Lakoba 1990a: 86-97, 130-133. Also see Sagaria 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Dzapshba 1996; Otyrba 1994: 284-285; Marykhuba 1994b: 65-67). In 1937, Abkhazia suffered total collectivization, accompanied by mass repression (for example, see Danilov 1990: 12-15). More than 2,000 people were arrested between July 1937 and October 1938, and one third of them were executed by firing squads (Lakoba 1993: 345-347; Marykhuba 1994a: 119). The Abkhazian demographic losses are apparent from the following statistics: the share of the Abkhazians in Abkhazia dropped from 27.8 percent to 18.0 percent, between 1926 and 1939. True, the share of Georgians was also somewhat reduced – from 33.6 percent to 29.5 percent (Slider 1985: 52, table 1). However, the inflow of the Georgian (Mingrelian) population from western Georgia increased considerably in the following years, and in order to provide the new settlers with plots of land, land was withdrawn from the Abkhazian kolkhozes. Because of this policy, the Abkhazians became an ethnic minority at their own territory. Suffice it to say, over the following twenty years (between 1939 and 1959) the Georgian population in Abkhazia increased by 66,254 and the Abkhazian population by only 5,000 (Lakoba 1990a: 92; Lakoba 1993: 347-354; Sagaria 1990b)¹⁰.

In 1937-1938, the Georgian authorities moved to a policy of ethnocide. First, a new Abkhazian alphabet was invented based on the Georgian script. Then Abkhazian was pushed out of schools, and Georgian was introduced as the language of instruction instead. The Georgianization of local place names commenced. The Abkhazians were entirely forced out of the power structures by the mid-1940s. In brief, the hasty forcible integration of the Abkhazians into the Georgian entity was encouraged. In order to achieve this end, the Abkhazians were represented as one of the Georgian ethnic groups, and, as we shall see further on, Georgian scholars were developing their own version of ethnogenesis for them.

This policy reached its climax in the 1940s. In August – September 1941,

twenty renowned Abkhazian intellectuals were arrested, with S. Basaria among them. They were accused of the establishment of a nationalist organization and a plot against the Soviet regime. Most of them were soon shot to death¹¹). In March 1945, the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the Communist Party of Georgia (CPG) passed a decree on the introduction of Georgian as the language of instruction in Abkhazian schools, and this was approved by the Central Committee of the CPG in June that year. This decision was confirmed with reference to the “community of material and spiritual culture of the related Georgian and Abkhazian peoples”. In those days, the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the CPG, A. Mgeladze, entirely denied the existence of a distinct Abkhazian language, and argued that the Abkhazians spoke distorted Georgian (Marykhuba 1994b: 66). In 1945-1946, Abkhazian was entirely forced out and replaced by Georgian as the language of instruction in schools. Then the ethnic composition of school staffs was drastically changed, and ethnic Georgians were hired first, all other things being equal. Georgian textbooks were introduced to replace the Russian and Abkhazian ones (Marykhuba 1994a: 81-82)¹²).

In August 1936, Sukhum was renamed Sukhumi, and the campaign for the Georgianization of Abkhazian place names commenced. Between 1948 and 1952, more than 147 localities were renamed in Abkhazia. In July 1946, signboards with Abkhazian inscriptions disappeared, and the Union of Writers of Abkhazia was renamed the Abkhazian Branch of the Union of Writers of Georgia. Newspapers and magazines in Abkhazian were closed down, and broadcasting in Abkhazian ceased. Simultaneously, the Abkhazian State Ensemble was renamed to the “State Ensemble of Georgian Folk Singers and Dancers”. From the early 1940s, the very term “Abkhazian people” was attacked (Marykhuba 1994a: 84-85, 90-91). The Abkhazians’ timid attempts to protest against this policy were treated by the authorities as the intrigues of “bourgeois nationalists” and were brutally persecuted (Sagaria 1990b; Lakoba 1990a: 92-96, 123; Marykhuba 1994a: 94-95; Dzaphsba 1996: 64-66; Slider 1985: 53-54; Hewitt 1993: 281-282, 1995b: 57)¹³).

Moreover, the total resettlement of the Abkhazians out of Abkhazia was planned in the early 1950s, and it is no accident that separate chapters in the book by the Georgian self-educated specialist in history of literature, Pavle Ingoroqva, were published in 1949-1951. As we shall see later on, this author argued that the Abkhazians were newcomers who had arrived in Abkhazia relatively recently (Lakoba 1990a: 97-98; 2000: 17; Marykhuba 1994b: 32-33; Hewitt 1993: 281-282, 1995b: 57). The Abkhazians were lucky in that they had avoided being deprived of their homeland. The Greeks had been resettled to Kazakhstan from Abkhazia in 1949, and they only managed to come back in 1954 (Mamulidi 1989; Keshanidi 1989).

Only after Stalin’s death and the dismissal of Beria were measures taken in 1953-1955 to restore justice and to give the Abkhazians back their legal rights. The Presidium of the CC CPSU passed a decree on June 10, 1956, “On the errors and shortcomings of the activities of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of

Georgia". It recognized that a "policy aimed at the elimination of the national culture of the local Abkhazian, Armenian and Ossetian populations was implemented, and their forcible assimilation was carried on" in Georgia. After that, Abkhazian schools were restored, courses were reintroduced in the Abkhazian language and literature. The fired Abkhazian teachers were reinstated. The Abkhazian alphabet, based on the Russian script, became popular once again, and the former names of some localities were restored (Sagaria 1990b).

Beginning in 1947, an Abkhazian struggle against discrimination was waged, mainly, through letters and petitions signed by well-known Abkhazian intellectuals and sent to the CC CPSU and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Marykhuba 1994a). This movement was begun by G. A. Dzidzariia, B. V. Shinkuba and K. S. Shakryl who, already in 1947 had expressed their indignation over the ethnocide carried out by the Georgian authorities (Marykhuba 1994a: 81-86; Sagaria 1990)¹⁴).

In May 1954, they were joined by the prominent Abkhazian poet and political activist, Dmitry Gulia, who drew the central authorities' attention to the persecutions of the Abkhazian culture and language, and once again raised the issue of the incorporation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation (Marykhuba 1994a: 110-113). In the 1960s – 1980s, this sort of letter writing turned into a sort of mass activity. Letters were read at crowded meetings and signatures of support were collected. In those days, the Georgian historical or philological publications were treated by the Abkhazians as being anti-Abkhazian, and served as excuses for manifestations of the people's will. In this climate, scholarly problems became of extraordinary importance to the general public. In the words of a contemporary Abkhazian researcher, the "long Georgian pressure on Abkhazia produced an environment under which Abkhazian studies enjoyed great political importance" (Dzapshba 1996: 69).

In the 1950s, all Abkhazia was incited by Pavle Ingoroqva's book, and Abkhazian scholars did their best to convict him of distorting historical facts. Public indignation was so high that both the Abkhazian and Georgian Party authorities had to adopt special resolutions condemning the book (Lakoba 1990a: 97-98; Dzapshba 1996: 79; Lezhava 1997: 174-183). In 1965, the Abkhazian public came out against a book published by the director of the Abkhazian Research Institute, the philologist Kh. S. Bgaghba, who demonstrated that Abkhazian was greatly affected by Georgian (Bgaghba 1964). Being very familiar with the recent policy of Georgianization, the Abkhazians saw this publication as a new attempt to view them as an integral part of the Georgian nation. In response, a crowded meeting was held in Sukhumi, which called for radical changes in the employment policy in Abkhazia that discriminated against Abkhazians. This criticism was aimed, in particular, at the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the CPG, M. G. Bgaghba, the brother of the aforementioned scholar (Marykhuba 1994a: 138-150). A protocol of the meeting with numerous signatures was sent to the CC CPSU. The result was that many of those having signed it incurred administrative or Party penalties. This did not discourage the Abkhazians, though,

and very soon, a new reason arose for them to claim their human rights. The third volume of the collected works of the well-known Georgian historian, the Academician N. Berdzenishvili, had come out in 1967, which represented the Georgians as the direct descendants of the early indigenous population of Abkhazia. Protests against this new falsification of history turned into bitter criticism of the policies of the Georgian authorities. At that time, the Abkhazians escaped repression only by a miracle (Marykhuba 1994a: 159-163; Dzapshba 1996: 79-80).

The next campaign was launched in 1977-1978, on the occasion of the adoption of the new Constitution of the USSR and the Constitution of the Georgian SSR. The new Georgian Constitution granted the Georgian language state status within the territory of the republic. The Georgians introduced this point deliberately, because of fear of Russification. Yet, what seemed a natural protective response from the Georgians proved unacceptable in the Abkhazian view. Indeed, the Abkhazians had been for a long time quite accustomed to having Russian as a second native tongue. They used Mingrelian as a third language, in order to communicate with the neighboring Mingrelians. The introduction of one more language poorly fit the existing socio-linguistic situation. It was perceived by the Abkhazians not only as an unnecessary burden but also as a direct threat to their own language. That is why they were unwilling to re-learn in the Georgian way (Hewitt 1996: 203). Initially, Abkhazian scholars protested the distortions of the history of the Abkhazian people made by Georgian scholars. This was followed by a letter by 130 well known Abkhazian intellectuals complaining about discrimination against the Abkhazian people and the de facto violation of Abkhazian autonomy by Georgian authorities. The letter was put together by a group of Abkhazian scholars, including I. R. Markholia, A. A. Anshba, O. N. Damenia, R. K. Chanba, and V. L. Tsvinaria, among others. The authors were alarmed about the coming Georgianization and called for Abkhazia to be withdrawn from the Georgian SSR (Obrashchenie 1977; Marykhuba 1994a: 164-187; Lakoba 1998b: 97-98). The Abkhazians sent letters with similar content in the early 1980s, as well.

This matter was not limited to the activities of only a few intellectuals. Persecutions of their authors in 1978 caused a wave of protest throughout Abkhazia; whole villages took part in a campaign that embraced thousands of people, including even some members of the Abkhazian government. Gradually, the campaign began to take an anti-Georgian stance. No other republic of the USSR witnessed such mass protest movements, including long-term strikes by workers and clerks during that period (September 1978). The authorities were seriously alarmed, and many replacements were made among both Soviet and Party officials in Abkhazia and Georgia. In June 1978, the First Secretary of the CC CPG, E. A. Shevardnadze (who occupied this position from 1972 to 1985) gave a speech at the Meeting of the CC CPG, in which he recognized the fact of anti-Abkhazian discrimination by Georgian authorities. After that, the Abkhazians received some privileges; in particular, Abkhazian State University was established in Sukhumi, on

the foundation of the former Pedagogical Institute. It became an important Abkhazian national symbol. Yet, the general attitude of Georgian authorities towards the Abkhazians did not change much. When the new Constitution of Abkhazia was adopted in 1978, the building where it was signed, the Abkhazian Branch of the CPG, had to be surrounded by the military against possible public protest (Dzaphsba 1996: 72-75, 80-81; Slider 1985: 59-64; Hewitt 1993: 282; Lakoba 1998b: 98).

The Abkhazian protest campaigns brought about some benefits. In the 1950s – 1980s, the situation was gradually improving but the changes were fairly contradictory. For example, Abkhazians accounted for only 17 percent of the population of the Abkhazian ASSR in the 1950s – 1970s. Yet, Abkhazians accounted for 37 to 45 percent of the secretaries of the Party organizations at various levels. At the same time, their share of the overall Party membership fluctuated between 13 and 19 percent, whereas Georgians accounted for more than 50 percent of Party members in Abkhazia. As a result, Abkhazians were often Party bosses over Georgians.

Russian was the second language in Abkhazia for both the Abkhazians and Georgians, while it was more popular among the former than among the latter (75 and 56 percent respectively, in 1979). This meant that only a few Abkhazians were able to receive higher education in Tbilisi, where Georgian was the language of instruction in school. That is why, before the Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute was reorganized to become Abkhazian State University (ASU), many Abkhazians tried very hard to receive a higher education in the Russian Federation, and that was not an easy task for them. In fact, there were ten times as many Abkhazian university students after the establishment of the ASU.

In any case, the Abkhazians enjoyed lower standards of education than the Georgians did, and this factor limited their access to prestigious positions. Furthermore, Abkhazia served as a recreational area; it was not developed for industry, and rural inhabitants made up the great bulk of its population. Abkhazia received financial resources through Tbilisi rather than directly from Moscow, and decisions made in Tbilisi were rarely favorable to Abkhazia. In terms of capital investments per person, Abkhazia was far behind other regions of Georgia, and its enterprises used equipment that was not updated for years. Thus, both labor productivity and people's incomes were much lower there than in the rest of Georgia (Slider 1985: 53-59).

The measures taken in 1978 were unable to ease Georgian-Abkhazian tensions in any significant way. The most important power positions were distributed among the Abkhazians and Georgians in Abkhazia in the very late 1980s in the following way. There were 55 Abkhazians and 56 Georgians in the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, and Georgians even predominated in the local Soviets – 47 percent Georgians versus 26 percent Abkhazians. The key positions in the Soviet of Ministers of Abkhazia were occupied by 16 Abkhazians and 24 Georgians. At the same time, there were 191 Abkhazians and 322 Georgians who were managers in

industry, transport, construction, and agriculture (V krivom zerkale 1989)¹⁵). Thus, although the share of Abkhazians among the Republic's leaders was somewhat lower than the share of the Georgians, it was much higher than their representation among the Republic's overall population. That was why the Georgians constantly complained of Abkhazian domination in Soviet and Party bureaucratic bodies (for example, see Nodia 1998: 23). The Abkhazians responded that all the appointments to higher positions were made in Tbilisi, where they selected loyal officials and kept them under permanent control. Moreover, when A. Sakvarelidze was the Second Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Branch of the CPG and later the Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of Abkhazia, the Abkhazians had almost no access to decision-making when key issues were discussed, and their views were often ignored altogether (Marshania 1995: 198).

The Abkhazians complained of that real economic power in Abkhazia was held by the Georgians, who dominated over the other directors of various enterprises. Georgians made up the bulk of the ASU faculty (up to 70 percent) and they enjoyed equal shares with the Abkhazians among its managers. Yet, the Georgians used to disseminate rumors that the Abkhazians had taken all the key positions at ASU. True, in practical terms it was easier for Abkhazian then for the Georgian youngsters to enter the University. Georgians predominated in the staff of the Republic's hospital. After all, many levers of control were operated from Tbilisi. For example, the Abkhazian newspaper, "Bzyb", received its paper from there, and in 1989, when the Georgian authorities got angry with items it published, they sharply reduced the paper supply. Whereas the establishment of the ASU was seen positively by the Abkhazians, they were greatly alarmed with the development of the Institute of Sub-tropical Plants in Sukhumi, where Georgians made up the main body of the students (up to 90 percent) as well as the faculty. This Institute was one of the factors in the development of well-trained Georgians in Abkhazia, who proved to be strong competitors with the Abkhazians (Shnirelman 1989a. Also see V krivom zerkale 1989; Kvarchia 1989).

At the same time, the Georgians used to refer to the ingratitude of the Abkhazian who, while having a population of less than 100 thousand people, enjoyed their own University, a TV program, belle-lettres published in numerous copies and disproportionally high representation in the structures of power (for example, see Amiredzibi 1992; Totadze 1994: 24-25). Yet, as G. Hewitt had already noted, the Abkhazian sections of the ASU was smaller and weaker than the Russian and the Georgian ones; Abkhazian TV programs were at first broadcast for only half an hour twice a week, and only in 1989 were they extended to three hours, though late at night (Hewitt 1993: 285).

By the end of the 1980s, the situation had become dramatic. Georgian nationalists became increasingly more active and openly manifested their desire to break away from the USSR and build an independent democratic Georgian state. At the same time, while recalling the violations of minority rights in the Democratic Georgia of 1918-1921, and responding negatively to the chauvinist slogans of some

informal Georgian movements, the Abkhazians insisted with more persistence on the return of Abkhazia to the status of a sovereign republic, and emphasized the impossibility of continued inclusion of Abkhazia within Georgia. The Abkhazians addressed all these arguments at the 19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU, in a letter sent in June 1988 and signed by 60 well known Abkhazian scholars and cultural activists. The first version of this letter was written by the head of the Department of Pre-Revolutionary History of the Abkhazian State Museum, I. R. Markholia, and a researcher at the Institute of History of the USSR from the USSR Academy of Sciences, G. N. Trapeznikov. It addressed the same issues as were expressed in the appeal by Abkhazian intellectuals to the Soviet leaders in 1977 (Marykhuba 1994a: 164-187). A final version of the new appeal was completed by the scientific secretary of the Abkhazian State Museum, A. N. Abregov, and it was edited by the Abkhazian specialist in law, T. M. Shamba (Prilozhenie 1989. Also see Marykhuba 1994a: 383-439).

On March 18, 1989, this famous "Abkhazian letter" received public support at a crowded meeting in the village of Lykhny. Its core issue was the demand to give back Abkhazian political status, that had been approved by the Abkhazian people in March 1921. This letter of appeal was signed by 32 thousand adult citizens of the Republic, including 5 thousand Russians, Armenians, Greeks, Georgians and others (Ardzinba 1989). Bearing in mind that the Abkhazians accounted for slightly more than 93 thousand people in Abkhazia at that time, one can conclude that the letter was signed by almost all the adult Abkhazians. The very place of the meeting was of high significance for the Abkhazians. The country estate of the Shervashidze princely family, where key decisions in Abkhazian history had historically been made, was located there. Thus, the legitimacy of the decision was hardly questioned by any Abkhazian (Marykhuba 1994b: 12-13; Dzapshba 1996: 75-76, 81-82).

Meanwhile, nobody was eager to share the Abkhazians' alarm, let alone meet their demands. These were all unacceptable to Georgia, both to the Communists and, even more so, to informal political groups. The Federal Center was much too involved in internal confrontation within the power structure, between reformers and conservatives, and was unable to cope with the overall growth of tensions in the country. That was why all efforts were made to avoid an open conflict with Georgia. As concerned those international organizations, whose intervention would have been appreciated by the Abkhazians, they were enchanted with Gorbachev's reform activities, and were expecting only positive results from them. They avoided taking any measures that might damage his reputation. As a result, the Abkhazians had to withstand alone the growing wave of Georgian chauvinism which had especially flourished under President Gamsakhurdia, who had come to power in the fall of 1990. This was preceded by the tragic events of 1989 (the Abkhazian-Georgian clashes in connections with the establishment of the Tbilisi University Branch in Sukhumi, and then, the two-day war of June 15-16, 1989) that were followed by the Georgian-Abkhazian War of 1992-1993 and the final breakup when Georgian-Abkhazian relationships led to a deadlock.

The shortsighted policies of both the Georgian informal organizations and Gamsakhurdia's government were by no means aimed at the Abkhazians alone. Simultaneously, tensions were growing with Armenian and Azeri minorities at the Georgian southern and eastern borders, respectively. The Ajars were worried in the southwest, and South Ossetians in the north. They were especially alarmed after Gamsakhurdia's government, anxious about the "purity of the nation", managed to resettle four thousand Daghestanis out of Georgia (for that, see Hewitt 1993: 287; Otyrba 1994: 291), and the Georgian media began to disseminate calls for the abolition of Ajar autonomy (for example, see Dzhakhaia 1990).

In the meantime, the Abkhazian parliament passed the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Abkhazia on August 25, 1990, which met a negative response from Tbilisi. In 1992, Georgia denounced the Constitution of the Georgian SSR of 1978 and returned to the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia of February 1921, which contained no articles on autonomy for anyone. Initially, Abkhazia only aspired to restore Treaty Republic status, which it had enjoyed in 1925. Negotiations for that were carried out with Georgia in August 1992. That was broken up by the entrance of Georgian troops into Abkhazia. After that, the latter declared itself free of any obligations towards Georgia and brought into force an article of the Constitution of the SSR Abkhazia of 1925, which spoke of the right for separation and free self-determination. This was how Abkhazia came to declare its total state independence. This was finally approved by the new Constitution, adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia on November 26, 1994 (Dzapshba 1996: 47, 52-57; Hewitt 1993: 291; Otyrba 1994: 286-288; Lakoba 2001ab). Abkhazian leaders many times manifested their aspiration, first, to retain the multi-ethnic composition of the Republic's population, and second, to be part of a more inclusive political federation (Shamba 1990; Lakoba 1995: 103-104). In fact, Abkhazia had never planned to be totally independent; what the Abkhazians really wanted was that their rights as a distinct people with their own language and culture be respected (for that, see Hewitt 1996: 196).

Vladislav Ardzinba was elected the first president of the independent (albeit unrecognized) Republic of Abkhazia in 1994. New presidential elections and a referendum on the future status of the Republic were held on October 3, 1999. Eighty-seven percent of the registered citizens took part in them, and 99 percent of them voted for Ardzinba to be president for the next term, and 97 percent manifested their willingness to live in a sovereign republic (Globachev 1999).

CHAPTER 2

THE ABKHAZIAN REPUBLIC IN SEARCH OF ITS GLORIOUS ANCESTORS

The great political importance of early history and ethnography clearly expressed itself during the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the civil war in Russia. Both the Russian and Georgian authorities and politicians referred to history and ethnography, in order to legitimize their claims to the ownership of Abkhazia. For example, a representative of the Kuban' government, N. Vorobiev, maintained that the Abkhazians were by no means related to the Georgians, that they had been known on the Black Sea littoral since early medieval times, that they enjoyed their own state before being incorporated into Georgia, that their stay within the Georgian state was fairly brief, that Abkhazia had developed independently from Georgia from the late 15th century, and that the Abkhazians accounted for more than 50 percent of its population as late as 1917 (Vorobiev 1990).

On their side, Georgian authorities also tried to benefit from early history, in order to prove their claims for the northwestern Caucasian territories as far as Tuapse. They recruited the major Georgian historian, Ivane Dzhavakhishvili, who argued that the Abkhazians and the Georgians were closely related people, that Abkhazia had always been a part of Georgia, and that the borders of Abkhazia, and, thus, of Georgia once reached the mouth of the Kuban' River and the city of Tuapse. Pressed by the Georgians, the APS's representatives had to sign a document that told of Abkhazian historical rights to the Black Sea littoral as far as Tuapse. On May 1, 1919, the Georgian delegate made a statement at the Paris peace conference that Sochi was a Georgian city, and the entire eastern Black Sea region was a genuine Georgian territory (Basaria 1923: 92; Menteshashvili 1990: 35-36; Hewitt 1993: 279; Marykhuba 1994b: 25-26).

Meanwhile, Abkhazian intellectuals were also addressing the remote past of their own people and they attempted to decorate it with glorious deeds performed by their ancestors. They needed this past glory especially at the turn of the 20th century after Abkhazia had lost its name and its ethnic composition had rapidly changed to the disfavor of the Abkhazians. Abkhazian enlighteners did their best to arrest the process of erosion of the Abkhazian culture and to awaken self-awareness among the Abkhazians. The future Abkhazian poet, Dmitry Gulia, was one of those who began a literary tradition in Abkhazian¹⁶.

Dmitry Gulia (1874-1960) was born to an Abkhazian peasant family in the village of Uarcha in the Lower Kodor River Valley. His childhood was closely linked with one of the most tragic events of Abkhazian history, the Makhadzhirstvo, when hundreds of thousands of Caucasian highlanders were forced out of their lands by the Russian authorities and had to search for refuge in Turkey and in other regions of the Near East. Dmitry's father, Joseph Gulia, was one of those who finally came back after suffering severe adversities during his period of exile.

Dmitry studied first with the local priest and then at a unique two-year primary school in Sukhum, intended for Caucasian highlanders. After that, he attended a teachers' seminary in Gori for four months. At that time, he was strongly affected by the school supervisor, K. D. Machavariani, who aroused his interest in philology, folklore and the history of Abkhazia. In his teens, Dmitry was already fluent in Russian and Georgian, and he knew the Abkhazian epic, the tales of the Narts, introduced to him by his father. From his youth, Gulia contributed to Abkhazian public education, which became his life's work. Machavariani involved him in a project focused on the improvement of the Abkhazian alphabet. The latter was invented by the gifted linguist, Major-General P. K. Uslar, in 1862; another version of the alphabet was suggested by a commission headed by General I. A. Bartolomei, which became the basis of the first Abkhazian primer, published in 1865. Machavariani and Gulia finally completed this task and published an Abkhazian primer in Tbilisi in 1892. This book turned out to be the first one used for Abkhazian education in the native language (Bgazhba 1967: 41-52). Dmitry Gulia was one of the first rural teachers to occupy himself with this task since the 1890s. In 1918, he began to publish his own verses in Abkhazian and, in fact, became one of the founders of Abkhazian belle-lettres (Gulia 1925: 20-21; Delba 1937; Gulia 1962: 19-20, 31, 44, 47, 112 ff.; Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965: 67 ff.).

In the 1920s, Gulia was a great figure among the few Abkhazian intellectuals, and he was even a member of the Abkhazian government in 1921. In 1925, he published a book entitled "The History of Abkhazia" that played an important role in shaping Abkhazian national self-awareness. In 1928 – 1929, he was the director of the Academy of Abkhazian Language and Literature founded in 1925 through the initiative of the Academician N. Ya. Marr. Then, having been heavily attacked by his critics, Gulia has lost his former position and for the rest of his life worked as a researcher at the Academy, which in 1931 was reorganized into the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Georgian branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. There he focused mainly on Abkhazian language, folklore and literature. He was awarded the honorary title of People's Poet of Abkhazia by the Abkhazian government, on January 1, 1937, and was a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR in 1938.

In 1937-1938, under heavy pressure from Tbilisi, Gulia had to take part in the elaboration of the new Abkhazian alphabet, this time based on the Georgian script. Simultaneously, he was compiling a textbook in Georgian for the Abkhazian schools (Sagaria 1990)¹⁷. All this activity hardly provided him with moral

satisfaction. He was so shocked by the closing of the Abkhazian schools in 1946 that he became quite ill. Yet, this did not save him from bitter criticism, caused by the new campaign against his "The History of Abkhazia" (Gulia 1962: 219-220) that will be discussed further on. In May 1954, Gulia sent a letter to Khrushchev about the persecutions of Abkhazian culture and education, and requested Abkhazia to be transferred to the Russian Federation (Marykhuba 1994a: 110-111; Dzapshba 1996: 72). Remaining alive by a miracle through the time of Stalin's repressions (the authorities did not dare to arrest the only People's poet of Abkhazia), Dmitry Gulia was devoted to the Abkhazian culture throughout his long life and did a lot for its development. He was twice (in 1954 and 1958) elected deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and they reckoned with him in Abkhazia.

As was noted, he was interested in the remote history of Abkhazia from his early days and collected various bits of highly fragmentary evidence in order to answer questions that had tormented the Abkhazian intellectuals for so long. Who were the Abkhazians, where did they come from before they arrived in the Caucasus, who were their distant ancestors and, finally, what was the reason for their miserable fate at the turn of the 20th century (for that, see Marr 1926: 134)? All these questions were inspired by discussions with Machavariani, who acquainted Gulia with his own excerpts of the manuscripts of early and medieval authors. Gulia was especially fond of Herodotus, who depicted the glorious past of the Colchians and traced them to Egypt. Shortly before World War I, Gulia became acquainted with N. Ya. Marr, who encouraged Gulia's research along these lines. At that time, Marr argued that in their language and culture the Abkhazians were closely connected with the Near Eastern region, which was where one should look for their roots (Marr 1916. For that, see Gulia 1962: 31, 64, 99-100).

Gulia's attraction to early history was far from a purely academic interest; he sincerely believed that, in order to enjoy self-awareness, people had to have their own distinct history. That is why he viewed his own writing on Abkhazian history as a very patriotic act, and occupied himself with it in the 1910s to early 1920s, albeit by fits and starts. Although Gulia had written many works during his life, "The History of Abkhazia" was his favorite, according to his son's account (Gulia 1962: 100, 122, 158-160). In fact, as another outstanding Abkhazian scholar, Sh. D. Inal-Ipa, pointed out, this book was the "first audacious attempt to give meaning to the early and medieval history of Abkhazia" (Inal-Ipa 1974: 54)¹⁸. This was recognized by even the most severe critics of "The History of Abkhazia" (Agrba, Khashba 1934: 17; Delba 1937: 42-43).

While excusing his own sincere interest in the subject, Gulia emphasized that the numerically small Abkhazian people of the present day, albeit having enjoyed a great past, had not mastered it, because their complete history was still unwritten, and the fragmentary data provided by the early authors had never been collected and systematized (Gulia 1925: 7-9). What were the main ideas of "The History of Abkhazia"? It contained several crucial points, some of which were appreciated by the Soviet historical tradition, others were flatly repudiated, still others were a

matter of discourse between Abkhazian and Georgian scholars. First, Gulia identified the Abkhazian ancestors with the Heniokhoi, who were located on the eastern Black Sea coast by classical authors. Second, he identified the Heniokhoi with the Colchians and brought them out of Egypt, and more precisely, out of Ethiopia. Third, he viewed the Abkhazians as the closest relatives of the medieval Zighi and their descendants, the Adyghes of the northwestern Caucasus. Fourth, he mentioned that they were related to the Georgian tribes as well (Svans, Laz, Kartvelians, and others). Following Marr, Gulia included the North Caucasian languages (and Abkhazian as one of them) in the Yaphetic family of languages, and pointed out their direct connection with Urartian (Van) cuneiform inscriptions. He found a Yaphetic sub-stratum in Armenian, and depicted mass Yaphetic migrations north to the Caucasus, where the newcomers merged with the local inhabitants.

Moreover, he related the arrival of the Colchians to all these processes in the eastern Black Sea region and argued that, contrary to what the Georgian historians were saying, they must be identified with the Abkhazians-Adyghes rather than with the Mingrelian-Laz. Like many of his contemporaries, Gulia was fascinated by the incredible discoveries in the field of Hittite studies and believed that the Hittites would have played an outstanding role in all the processes in question. While referring to the fragmentary but impressive archaeological data, he assumed that a brilliant Bronze Age culture had probably been brought to the Caucasus from the south with tribes who were relatives of the Hittites (Gulia 1925: 89-91). Gulia went so far as to suppose that the Hittites founded Sukhum, and that it was one of the earliest cities in the Caucasus (Gulia 1925: 146-147).

Having identified the classical Heniokhoi with the Colchians, Gulia settled them throughout the vast territory that embraced not only historical Colchis, which, in his representation, covered territories of contemporary Abkhazia, Mingrelia, Imereti, Svaneti, Guria and Lazistan, but even Armenia as far as sources of the Euphrates (evidently, Gulia followed Marr and some other contemporary authors). Struck by the tribal name replacements in the east Black Sea region in the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. to the very early 1st Millennium A.D., Gulia interpreted this development with reference to changes in the military-political importance of various local tribes and the different degree of acquaintance of different classical authors with local population, rather than to any radical population shift. For example, local tribes were recorded by different Greek and Roman authors as either Colchians, or Heniokhoi, or Abasgoi, or Apsilae (Gulia 1925: 36, 41-52, 71, 76, 80-81). Following Marr, Gulia included the Moschi in the Colchian tribes (Gulia 1925: 82), thus bringing the Abkhazians into the long dispute between Armenian and Georgian scholars, focused on the ethnic identity of the early Moschi.

Moreover, Gulia noted that place names and river names of evidently Abkhazian-Adyghes origin were known in the territory of Georgia, including its eastern part (Gulia 1925: 62-64). The shrinking of this vast territory and the decline of the Abkhazian-Adyghes population was the result of extensive Georgianization in medieval times, Gulia maintained (Gulia 1925: 71). Yet, this had occurred later, he

argued, and initially the Abkhazians were civilizers. While living close to the seacoast and being in lively contact with the classical Greeks, they spread the fruits of civilization among all neighbors in the north, northwest and east. This lasted until the 10th century, when this process involved the Georgians (Gulia 1925: 143).

Finally, Gulia ascribed the emergence and development of the Abkhazian Kingdom between the very end of the 8th and the end of the 10th centuries to the local Abkhazian Dynasty, and claimed that once the Abkhazian Kings had governed certain Georgian rulers and even affected Armenia (Gulia 1925: 192-222).

Apparently, "The History of Abkhazia" touched nerves of Georgian historians and challenged them. Yet, it fortunately avoided severe criticism in Georgia in the climate of ideological pluralism of the 1920s; all the problems were still ahead. In the meantime, in 1929, Gulia was even awarded the Georgian Republic's Order of the Hero of Labor, and was elected a member of the Georgian Historical-Ethnographic Society.

On the other hand, the attitude towards Gulia's book in Abkhazia was unexpectedly fairly ambivalent. The weakest point of "The History of Abkhazia" dealt with Gulia's favorite idea about the arrival of the Abkhazian-Adygehe ancestors from Egypt and Abyssinia. It is worth noting that this was based not only on Herodotus' assumptions¹⁹), but on folk stories still popular among the north Caucasian peoples (for that see, for example, Marr 1926: 134; Inal-Ipa 1965: 104-106, 1976: 162-163). These stories affect certain local versions of ethnogenesis even nowadays. Moreover, in the views of contemporary specialists, there is a grain of truth there, since newcomers from the Mediterranean region took part in the ethnogenesis of local populations (Kaukhchishvili 1979: 116). Meanwhile, a relationship with Africans was outside the plans of Sukhum authorities. This was fairly emotionally articulated by N. Lakoba, who stated, "Let Gulia himself be three times an Ethiopian!" but the Abkhazians would manage without. That was why the Abkhazian authorities were by no means fascinated with the book. Although "The History of Abkhazia" had been completed by the end of 1922, and the author generously presented its ideas to the general public, from school teachers to Soviet and Party elite (Gulia 1925: 11), he had to publish it not in Sukhumi but in Tbilisi, where he was invited by I. A. Dzhavakhishvili to give a lecture course on Abkhazian in 1924-1925 (Gulia 1962: 158-160, 164; Inal-Ipa 1974: 28).

At the same time, this does not mean that all his ideas were unacceptable to the Abkhazian authorities or the patriots of those times. The pages that displayed the political and cultural achievements of the Abkhazian ancestors in Abkhazia itself and glorified their outstanding role in Caucasian history were appreciated. The Abkhazian Narkompros (Ministry of Education) was eager to publish this sort of book in Sukhumi. Abkhazian intellectuals were driven by the same aspirations as Gulia was, but they articulated them in a harsher and naked manner. They were highly dissatisfied with the great obscurity of Abkhazian history, and they used to chalk that up to the chauvinism of the Georgian, Armenian and Russian historians, who did not care about the destiny of the numerically small Abkhazian people

(Ashkhatsava 1925: 5-6). Actually, this attitude had been advocated by N. Ya. Marr for years (Marr 1916).

Thus, while the Gulia's volume was coming out in Tbilisi, a pamphlet was being published in Sukhumi, written by another well-known activist of the Abkhazian nationalist movement, S. M. Ashkhatsava²⁰). In fact, this was an extended version of a paper of his written at the request of the Abkhazian Scientific Society and delivered at the First Congress of the Activists for the Local Study of the Black Sea Littoral and Western Caucasus, held in Sukhum in September 1924.

The following points were of crucial importance to Ashkhatsava, who had placed special emphasis on them in his pamphlet. First, he related the earliest Transcaucasian civilization to the activity of one and the same group of people, who were the progenitors of the Nairi, or Urartians, and the founders of the earliest state there. In their culture, they were part of the "Assyrian-Babylonian world", and strongly influenced the northern regions up to the Upper Volga River. While claiming that, Ashkhatsava bore in mind (apparently, following Marr) that the Urartians were close relatives of the Abkhazians. Second, although the Armenians and the Kartvelians (Georgians) had come onto the historical scene after the decline of Urartu, they took back seats in the historical theatre until the Abkhazians had begun to build a powerful state. He maintained that this development had commenced very nearly the beginning of the Christian era, and that even Byzantium had had to reckon with the Abkhazians. Third, the Abkhazian kings decided to unite all the Kartvelian tribes for the sake of their own power, rather than in order to build up some "Georgian state". That was why it made no sense to talk of any peaceful unification; instead, new territories had been annexed through merciless military actions. Thus, the Abkhazian Kingdom consolidated its power and expanded its borders, until it had incorporated all the Georgian lands. Ashkhatsava further argued that as late as the very end of the 15th century, it was still the Abkhazian Kingdom, and its kings, including David the Builder and Queen Tamar, were the Abkhazian kings. Fourth, the idea of a new unification of lands, this time within the Georgian state, turned out to be a comparatively recent development, dating to the 16th – 17th centuries. At that time, Georgian patriotism made them radically rewrite history, and the unpleasant passages dealing with Abkhazian glory were harshly eliminated. Fifth, it seemed very important to Ashkhatsava to emphasize Abkhazian-Adyghe unity, and he remarked that both the Abkhazians and the Circassians had actually been the same people in the remote past, and that they were baptized together. Finally, Ashkhatsava argued that Christianity had already become widespread among the Abkhazians during the first centuries A.D., and they had their own bishop in the 3rd century A.D. Thus, he represented the Abkhazians as among the earliest Christians and hinted that the Abkhazian Church had been founded by St. Andrew himself²¹).

While accusing Georgian historians of a tendentious approach, Ashkhatsava believed that, all the same, traces of former Abkhazian glory must remain intact somewhere. True, the old manuscripts could have been destroyed and rewritten; yet,

there should be other sources, for example, archaeological materials. Indeed, in the early 20th century, archaeology had already proved to be a promising means of revitalizing forgotten early civilizations. Ashkhatsava also put his trust in early inscriptions, old coins, place names, linguistic data, and the like. In his enthusiasm, he sometimes went too far and made rather implausible assumptions. For example, he refused to acknowledge any links between the early and contemporary Georgian languages, and maintained without any reserve that the “old Georgian alphabet” had been invented by the Abkhazians and served for both the Abkhazian spoken and state languages. That was why he identified the medieval inscriptions glorifying the “Abkhazian Kings” as Abkhazian inscriptions, and there was no question for him of their language. He related the earliest coins in the east Black Sea region (“*colchidki*”) to the activities of the Abkhazian Dynasty. While mentioning Abkhazian place names in Georgia, he called the Moschi “Abkhazian ancestors”, which approach was shared by Gulia as well. Finally, referring to Marr, he argued that, according to linguistic data, Abkhazian strongly influenced Georgian, rather than vice-versa (Ashkhatsava 1925)²².

Having finished with the Georgian historical tradition, Ashkhatsava began the history of Abkhazia in the 11th century B.C., and called the period between the 8th and 15th centuries the “Abkhazian Epoch”. After that, the Abkhazian “Golden Age” was over, and a bad period began. Ashkhatsava chose to avoid going deeper into these later times. In this way, he pre-determined the line of the succeeding Abkhazian historical tradition, which focused on the search for the lost “Golden Age” and paid less attention to the period of the 15th – 18th centuries.

The same features of the Abkhazian historical tradition of the 1920s expressed themselves in a popular overview by S. P. Basaria that dealt with Abkhazian economic geography and ethnography. History was underrepresented in his book, and it seems important to analyze which particular historical facts he found worth mentioning. He identified the Abkhazians with the classical Heniokhoi tribe, and argued that they settled in Colchis as early as several centuries before the Christian Era, and dated the emergence of Sukhum to the time of Ramses II. Further on, Basaria pointed out proudly that, in contrast to Georgia, Abkhazia never lost its independence. Neither the Romans, nor the Byzantines, nor Genoan traders, nor the Turks were able to subjugate it. Retorting to certain Georgian authors, Basaria maintained that the Mingrelians, rather than the Abkhazians, were newcomers in this territory, and that the Abkhazians had not pushed the Mingrelians to the south, but, on the contrary, the Mingrelians had been expanding northwards and assimilated the Abkhazians. He was indignant about attempts to impose Christianity or Islam forcibly on the Abkhazians, and he argued that the Abkhazians enjoyed their own genuine monotheist tradition (Basaria 1923: 38, 43, 49-50, 57-58, 137-138).

To put it other way, after Abkhazia was granted relative sovereignty, Abkhazian intellectuals began to elaborate their own views of early history, where an honorable place was secured for their Abkhazian ancestors. First, the Abkhazians

were represented as the true indigenous people in the territory of Abkhazia. Even if their remote ancestors had arrived from elsewhere, this had occurred so early that the Abkhazians were still able to claim the status of first settlers with respect to their neighbors, including the Georgians above all. Second, the idea of early migration from the south was closely linked with the aspiration to relate the Abkhazian ancestors to the earliest civilizations of the Near East and to provide them the honorable status of civilizers. Third, it was assumed that the Abkhazian ancestors occupied much larger territories in the distant past and that their ethnic territory had shrunk over time. Fourth, the Abkhazian ancestors were represented as the bearers of a higher culture, who enlightened the formerly barbarian Caucasus. In particular, some versions depicted them as the earliest Christians in the Caucasus. Finally, the Abkhazians were identified as the founders of one of the earliest states in the Caucasus, who acquainted the Georgians with basic knowledge about political organization.

This version of the past had to convince both the Abkhazians themselves and the outside world that their claims to cultural authenticity and their own sovereign state were well grounded. Indeed, all of this was based on the supposedly undoubted historical merits of their remote ancestors. Simultaneously, this view clearly demonstrated competition between the Abkhazians and the Georgians; as we will see later on, that was a struggle for the same historical resources, and both sides tried to mobilize very similar cultural-historical arguments. The defeat of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the loss of independence by Georgia on the one hand, and the appropriation of political status by the Abkhazians to the extent that they formed their own republic on the other hand, resulted in the Abkhazians feeling superior to the Georgians. It seemed to take a long time for Georgian intellectuals to recover from the psychological shocks of the forcible annexation of Georgia by Soviet Russia, the suppression of the large-scale anti-Soviet uprising of 1924, and the anti-religious campaign of the early 1920s, that dealt a heavy blow to the Georgian Church and destroyed many outstanding historical monuments. All of this opened the way for the Abkhazians to develop their own view of history in the early 1920s, which let them winning at least a symbolic victory over the Georgians. They not only took back their own past but also appropriated part of the Georgian historical heritage. In political terms, this development was based on the sympathy of the early Soviet power towards ethnic minorities, manifested in the 1920s and openly demonstrated by the resolutions of the 12th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). In ideological terms, this approach was grounded on Marr's theory, in which he did his best to call the attention of the public to the cultures and histories of ethnic minorities.

It is worth noting that the Abkhazian issue was of special interest to Marr, and he returned to the discussion of it many times (Marr 1916, 1926, 1929, 1938). He was indignant about the neglect of the Abkhazians by Georgian and Armenian historians, and he argued that the "history of the Abkhazians was the beginning of the Georgian Bagratids Dynasty" (Marr 1916)²³. Marr's view of the earliest

Abkhazian past was rather inconsistent; it combined brilliant ideas with quite bizarre reasoning. Quite correctly, Marr related the Abkhazian language to North Caucasian ones, revealed a strong North Caucasian substratum in Armenian, and noticed numerous Georgian loan words in Abkhazian that he identified as the result of a relatively recent cultural process. At the same time, he identified the Scythians with the Colchians and localized the early Etruscans in the Volga River Valley. His view of the Abkhazians' arrival in the Caucasus was particularly contradictory. On the one hand, he wrote of the arrival of the Yaphetids (including the Abkhazian ancestors) from the Near East (Marr 1916), and on the other hand, argued that Abkhazian developed in the northern Caucasus (Marr 1926: 154). He assumed that the Abkhazians had already arrived in the eastern Black Sea region in the classical period, pushing the unrelated Colchians southward (Marr 1926: 146-147, 153-154). He was convinced that the Abkhazians occupied a much larger territory in the remote past than they do nowadays, and were superior to the Georgians in socio-political terms. The Abkhazians not only founded their own state but also incorporated the Georgians into it, and they affected the Georgian language. While emphasizing their political dominance, Marr remarked that, up to Queen Tamar's time, the king's title began with the words the "King of the Abkhazians" (Marr 1929).

In brief, this view contained different arguments. Some of them could be used to advantage by the Abkhazians and others by the Georgians, to upgrade their prestige. This is just what has happened. Yet, whereas the Abkhaziocentric view of the remote past met no obstacles in the 1920s, the situation reversed over the next decade. There were two reasons for that – one general, and another one specific to Abkhazia. The former was the "Marxist revolution" in Soviet scholarship, which caused a radical revision of certain approaches popular in the past, such as migrationism (Shnirelman 1995: 125-126, 1996a: 231-232). The latter was the reduction of the political status of Abkhazia, its incorporation into Georgia, albeit as an Autonomous Republic. Indeed, all the Abkhazian historical institutions were now subordinated by Tbilisi Center, which began to implement control over them.

In the early 1930s, Soviet scholars were obliged to struggle against migrationism, nationalism and chauvinism. In Abkhazia, this campaign focused on the writings of Basaria, Ashkhatsava and Gulia, who were accused not only of the methodological errors but, most of all, of their adherence to the "bourgeois theory of migration", local nationalism and even "Abkhazian chauvinism", therefore, of propagandizing "anti-Marxist" and "anti-Communist" ideas. Ashkhatsava was especially severely criticized for exaggerating the historical role of the Abkhazian people and attempting to appropriate the Georgian writing system. Gulia's hypothesis of the Abyssinian roots of the Abkhazians was also rejected. Now, to conform to the Marrist-Marxist historical concept, the Abkhazians had to be undoubtedly of local origin. The "Abkhazian people must have formed through a merger of tribes which, in their turn, had originated in a merger of small ethnic clan and totemic groups that lived in the Caucasus". The authors of this criticism took an

internationalist stance and argued that one should not glorify one people's achievements at the expense of another. They even manifested readiness to throw away the very name, the "Abkhazian Kingdom", for it was an "allied state of Abkhazians, Kartvelians and other tribes" (Agrba, Khashba 1934; Delba 1937: 43-44. For that, see Gulia 1962: 162-165).

In the early 1930s, the authors of "non-Marxist works" were the target of severe criticism by local party cells, and were also attacked by local mass media (Agrba, Khashba 1934: 18. For that, see Gulia 1962: 164-165). Yet they experienced no administrative persecutions. After they had symbolically recognized their errors, they kept working for the benefit of Abkhazia. Retribution came somewhat later, in the very late 1930s – early 1940s, when Basaria and Ashkhatsava, together with their critics, disappeared in the crucible of Stalin's repressions.

For the time being, the matter was settled with a change in paradigm, and the Russian author, A. V. Fadeev, was asked to write a history of Abkhazia. He based his views on the new ethnogenetic concept elaborated by the Academician Marr and extensively introduced by the State Academy of History of Material Culture (Leningrad), the main institution in those days concerned with the prehistoric and early historic past. The ethnic situation of the early Colchis was reconstructed quite differently. There were neither "peoples", nor "states" in the region. Instead, there were small linguistically unrelated groups with unstable membership, and their merger into larger and more stable ethnic entities still lay ahead. Neither the Abkhazians nor the Kartvelians existed by the beginning of the Christian era, let alone distinct languages. Despite that, the classical authors provided all those small groups with distinct names and, quite erroneously, represented them as independent peoples. It was no less erroneous to represent the Colchians as a homogeneous ethnic community, for this inclusive term covered all the different groups who lived in Colchis. Only quite gradually did the unification of separate groups into larger cultural entities develop as was demonstrated by tribal name replacement, i.e. shifts from Heniokhoi to Apsilae and Abasgoi, and from Colchians to Laz (Fadeev 1934: 44-66).

Concerning political development, Fadeev acknowledged that the Georgian ancestors, the Iberians and the Laz, had a certain superiority, as they enjoyed the rule of tribal chiefs already by the beginning of the Christian era. Yet the same occurred among the Apsilae and Abasgoi soon thereafter, and, in Fadeev's view, distinct Abkhazian-Adyghe tribes might have emerged in the first centuries A.D. (Fadeev 1934: 66-68, 75). He depicted the formation of the earliest state in Colchis in the following way. A flourishing of Lazica was observed in the beginning of the medieval period that was based on a powerful tribal alliance, which included both the Georgian ancestors and Abkhazian tribes with their own chiefs. In the 6th – 8th centuries, the southern and eastern regions were weakened and depopulated as the result of a long, exhausting struggle against external enemies – first, the Persians, and then the Arabs. In the 660s, Iberia had fallen and was annexed by the Caliphate,

and its Kartvelian kings had to look for refuge among the Abkhazians. Lazica had also been plundered and fallen into decline. Due to the geographical remoteness of Abkhazia from the main battlefields and because of its rulers' skillful playing upon the tensions between the Caliphate and Byzantium, the Abkhazians not only escaped heavy losses but also retained their political system and rose over neighboring tribes. Their ruler, Leon II, declared himself king, and quite easily subjugated all of western Transcaucasia. In this way a state emerged that was called an "Abkhazian-Kartvelian state" by Fadeev, who was willing to compromise the Abkhazian and the Georgian views of the past (Fadeev 1934: 70-81). It is worth noting in passing that this term could not satisfy the Abkhazian "internationalists" (Agrba, Khashba 1934: 19).

Over the next two centuries, the Abkhazian rulers waged an active offensive policy and proved able to annex not only numerous Kartvelian principalities but also certain neighboring territories. While integrating new lands, they supplemented their titles with related names. Since Abkhazia was their first estate, the king's title traditionally began with this particular name. For example, the unifier of western and eastern Georgia, the first ruler of the unified kingdom, Bagrat III, called himself the "King of the Abkhazians, Kartes, Kakhes, Laks and Armenians", and this tradition survived up to Queen Tamar. Fadeev maintained that the Abkhazians' role was not restricted to their formal place in the title. Abkhazian nobility enjoyed a prestigious position in the united kingdom, although its role was progressively diminishing with the shift of the political center eastward (first to Kutatisi and then to Tiflis). As a result, the Kartvelian language of the dominant majority was adopted as the state language: it was used for bureaucratic business, in the liturgy, and in literature. Thus, the Kartvelization of the state occurred, and Abkhazia was turned into a remote outlying region (Fadeev 1934: 84-89). It is worth mentioning that in developing this viewpoint, Fadeev followed Marr in many respects (cf. Marr 1929).

He did his best to demonstrate that, after Abkhazia lost its former power, it by no means dissolved among the Georgian population. Around 1125, King David the Builder appointed a member of the Shervashidze (Chachba) family a ruler ("*eristav*"). Members of this family became very enterprising, and after Georgia was ruined by the Mongol invasion of 1231-1232, David Shervashidze managed to be granted the hereditary right of power over Abkhazia. In the 14th century, his heirs broke away from Tbilisi *de facto*; and after the final disintegration of the united kingdom in the 15th century, Abkhazian independence was established *de jure* (Fadeev 1934: 89). Thus, Fadeev's concept, albeit more moderate than those of his predecessors of the 1920s, still represented the history of Abkhazia as being isolated from the history of Georgia, and moreover, provided it with a certain superiority in respect to the most crucial period of the emergence of the unified state.

CHAPTER 3

THE ADVENTURES OF THE EARLY GEORGIANS IN ASIA MINOR

Having been defeated by the Bolsheviks, Democratic Georgia had to set aside its historical ambitions. The Georgians were well aware of their great medieval history, but it was not appropriate to talk about that in the epoch of internationalism. Georgia was represented to the Soviet public of the 1920s as, although the “early hearth of the human culture”, a miserable country that was suffering permanently from its intermediate position between East and West. It was always being conquered by some enemies. Against this background, the Georgian medieval state of David the Builder and Queen Tamar looked like a minor unimportant entity (Bialetsky et al. 1929c: 9-10).

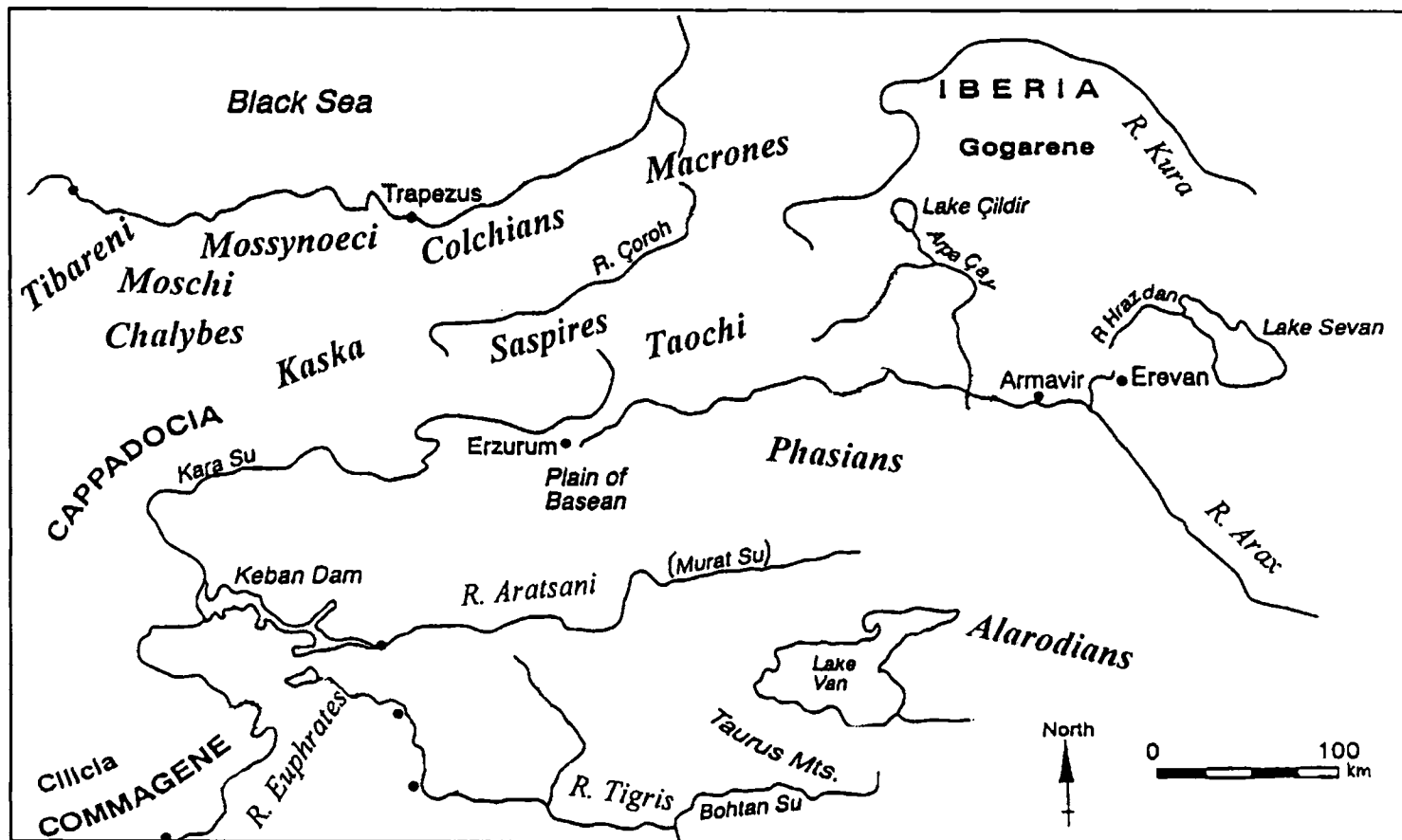
The historical process was depicted quite differently by Georgian historians who, like their Abkhazian counterparts, were attracted by the image of a Golden Age; the latter was linked with the Early Middle Ages and the climax of the Georgian civilization under David the Builder and Queen Tamar in the 12th – very early 13th centuries. Later historical periods, full of tragic events and disasters, met with less enthusiasm and did not attract that much attention from Georgian authors (for example, see Bakradze 1878: VI-VII). Instead, continual discussion focused on the roots of the Georgian state and the Georgian people. Having no reliable evidence for any simple conclusions, the Georgian researchers were intrigued by all these issues. First, they searched the far distant past, and second, tried hard to find ancestors among the founders of the earliest Near Eastern civilizations. Interesting to note, the best Georgian historians occupied themselves with this sort of project; somewhat later, they were joined by archaeologists. Before the revolution, these few specialists worked mainly outside Georgia, and as a rule, only less trained amateur enthusiasts focused on the history of their own people within Georgia. A professional Georgian school only formed in Tbilisi in the 1920s – 1930s to concentrate on the history of the Georgian people. Local professional archaeology emerged during the same period as well. The Academician Ivan A. Dzhavakhishvili played a crucial role in its development. As early as in 1908 he called archaeology the main tool for the reconstruction of the early history of the Georgian people. The first archaeological teams were created at the State Museum of Georgia and Tbilisi State University. Later on, the N. Ya. Marr Institute of Language, History and Material Culture was established in 1936 at the Georgian branch of the Academy of

Sciences of the USSR, which included an archaeological department as well (Melikishvili 1959: 10, note 3; Lordkipanidze 1976: 3-4, 1979a: 22-24, 1982: 5-7).

The Georgians concentrated on the southeastern Black Sea region in the 1870s, after Russian-Ottoman relationships got worse, the mass maxadzhirian migration to Turkey took place, and the future of the eastern Black Sea region became a hot issue. The prominent Georgian historian, D. Bakradze, who was interested in the local Christian heritage as well as the relations between the local population and the Georgians, visited Ajaria and Guria in 1873. He recorded the Christian churches and Georgian inscriptions of the 9th – 12th centuries in northeastern Turkey, and pointed to the close bonds between the Ajars and the Laz, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other hand. Citing Herodotus and Strabo, Bakradze located the Laz of classical times within an extensive region, which included Trebizond and reached the Halys (Kyzyl Irmak) River in the west. He pointed to the linguistic and cultural similarities between the Ajars and the Laz, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other hand, and argued that they were “one and the same people – the Kartvelians” (Bakradze 1878: 45). At the same time, he himself was not quite sure about that, and sometimes he opposed the Georgians to the Laz and Mingrelians (Bakradze 1878: 29). His followers were more straightforward.

A. S. Khakhanov (Khakhanashvili) was one of the first to address the issue of the earliest Georgian ancestors. He searched for them in Asia Minor (Khakhanov 1903). He based his ideas on Biblical sources, Josephus Flavius' narratives, and evidence from the classical Greek and Roman authors, all of whom mentioned the names of the numerous tribes occupying the northern regions of the early Near East and Transcaucasia during various periods. Khakhanov tried to figure out which of those names might have been connected with the Georgian ancestors. As a result, he listed “Meshekh” (Meseh, Moschi, Mushki, Mossynoeci), “Tubal” (Tabal, Tibareni), “Macrones”, “Saspies”, “Chalybes”, “Chans” (Tzannoi, Sannoi, Sanigai), and “Kashka/Kaska” (Colchians) among the latter. Initially, all of them lived in the northern regions of Asia Minor, close to the Halys River and also in the southeastern Black Sea region as far as the Çoroh River Valley in the northeast, and sometimes their area expanded to Cilicia in the south and the Upper Euphrates River in the east. By the mid-1st Millennium B.C., their area has shifted far eastward of the Halys River, and they were included in the XIX Satrapy of the Achaemenian Empire (map 16)²⁴).

By the time of Strabo, i.e. at the very beginning of the Christian era, some of them already lived in the southwest Georgian highlands and Colchis; others stayed in Asia Minor. Their descendants are the contemporary Turkish Laz and Tzans. At the same time, Khakhanov located the Laz and the Sannoi in the late classical Lazica, i.e. in the southern part of western Georgia (the Çoroh River Valley). This corresponds better with the views of certain contemporary specialists, who believe that these tribes resettled from Colchis to their present location fairly recently (Beller-Hann 1995: 488). Based on logical reasoning, Khakhanov deduced that there were Colchians among all these related groups who ultimately gave birth to



Map 16 Tribes of northeastern Asia Minor and the southwestern Caucasus in the very late 1st Millennium B.C. (after Redgate 1998)

the Georgian people (Khakhanov 1903: 10-15). Yet, he recognized that he still lacked any hard evidence for the identification of the early Colchis population with the Georgians (Khakhanov 1903: 18).

His assumption that the creators of the Van cuneiform inscriptions, the "Alarodians" (i.e. the Urartians. V. Sh.), might be identified with the Tibareni or Moschi, i.e. the Georgians, was even less well grounded. Yet, he emphasized that in those early days the Georgians occupied a substantial part of historical Armenia, long before the Armenian arrival (Khakhanov 1903: 19-20, 25, 39-55). The Chalybes, or Chaldaei, the well-known "inventors" of iron metallurgy, who were placed in the northern highlands of the Near East by certain classical authors, were also included in the list of Georgian ancestors by Khakhanov (Khakhanov 1903: 23-24).

It seemed very important to him, not only to reconstruct the maximum extensions of the territory occupied by the Georgians in the early days, and to identify numerous Georgian ancestors in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, but also to restore the glorious pages of their distant past. He was proud that the Mushki dominated Asia Minor in the 12th century B.C. and were successfully competing with even the Assyrians, and that the Moschi and Tibareni participated in the Scythian raids on Syria later on (Khakhanov 1903: 33). Moreover, with reference to archaeological data from Early Iron Age sites in the valleys of the Kura and Arax Rivers, Khakhanov argued that, in typological terms, the early Georgian civilization was similar to the Mycaenian, and in general Helladic. He placed their common roots in Mesopotamia and assumed that the Hittites played a crucial role in the dissemination of cultural achievements from there (Khakhanov 1903: 60). To put it differently, in order to restore the earliest Georgian past and to search for the Georgian ancestors, the Georgian Khakhanov used the same historical data and the same approach to their interpretation that the Abkhazian Gulia did later on. This method doomed both the Georgian and the Abkhazian historical schools to permanent competition throughout the 20th century.

What was the role of the Abkhazians in Khakhanov's views of the past? He was quite certain that they were different from the Georgians both in language and in origins. Following the first Georgian historian, D. Bakradze (Bakradze 1878: VI), he identified the earliest Colchis population with Georgian-speaking tribes and assumed that the Abkhazians arrived there much later. Yet, whereas Bakradze derived the Abkhazians from behind the Caucasian ridge in the north and dated their migration to the period between the 11th and 17th centuries (for that, see Hewitt 1993: 274, 1998: 118), Khakhanov believed that their arrival might be dated to the 2nd century A.D. It seems like he considered the Mingrelians to be the only inhabitants of Sukhum and its vicinity up to the 10th – 11th centuries A.D. In order to prove that, Khakhanov referred to a coin with a Georgian inscription, found in the territory of Sukhum (Khakhanov 1903: 62-63). Concerning the easternmost borders of the early Georgian area, Khakhanov went so far as to find some Georgian groups among the Caucasian Albania population, and thus extend their

borders as far as the Caspian Sea. In fact, there were no good reasons for that; Khakhanov expected that archaeologists would find evidence for it in the future (Khakhanov 1903: 63-64).

Khakhanov presented his concepts for the first time in a presentation at the 8th Congress of Scientists and Physicians in St. Petersburg, and the first version of his paper was published in 1890. His approach was characteristic of the Georgian historical field in the 1900s – 1920s. During that period, many Georgian historians derived the Georgians from the northern regions of the Near East, argued their primordial “national unity” and dated the roots of their state to the Early Iron Age, as though they still lived in Asia Minor at that time. This view was not only shared by major Georgian historians, but was represented in school textbooks (for that, see Soselia 1931: 183-201).

All of this was revised in the beginning of the 1930s. At that time, any “national unity” in the remote past was already out of question, and the “early Georgians” were represented as various distinct tribes who arrived to Transcaucasia separately from each other. One had to forget also about any “early Georgian state” in classical or earlier times, as the Marxist paradigm left no space for a state in a “clan society”. Thus, the hypothesis of the well-known Georgian historian, I. A. Dzhavakhishvili, of some “Colchian state” at the time of Strabo lost ground, and Dzhavakhishvili himself was accused of nationalism and a reactionary approach to history (Soselia 1931)²⁵. At the same time, as in Abkhazia, this did not cause any grave administrative persecutions, nor was the older generation of Georgian historians accused of “bourgeois migrationism”. Their Marxist critics themselves stuck to the idea of migrations of early Kartvelians to Transcaucasia from the south (for example, see Soselia 1931: 211). Apparently, the autochthonist paradigm, introduced by Marr, could not deprive the Georgians of the familiar beginnings of their history; they were not able to go that far, and did their best to adhere to the traditional approach.

Meanwhile, a great blow was dealt to the Georgian historical tradition, not so much by the introduction of the Marxist methodology as by the sensational discoveries of the Czech scholar, B. Hrozný, who related the Hittite language to Indo-European stock. After that, an obviously confused Dzhavakhishvili acknowledged that “all the grounds for the previous construction of the earliest stages of the Georgian history have disappeared” as scholars began to identify the Mushki and Tabals with the Indo-Europeans (Dzhavakhishvili 1950: 227-228)²⁶. There were two ways to solve the puzzle – either give up any search for Georgian ancestors in the south and develop a new idea, or put into question Hrozný’s approach, which turned out to be shared by most professionals. Dzhavakhishvili attempted to follow the former track, but the latter path seemed to be preferable to his student, Simon N. Dzhanaashia.

Professor Ivane A. Dzhavakhishvili (1876-1940) is considered to be the founder of the Soviet Georgian historical school. From his early days, he dreamed of studying his own people’s history. After graduation from the gymnasium in 1895,

he entered the Armenian-Georgian-Iranian Department at St. Petersburg University, where the well-known scholars, N. Ya. Marr and A. Tsagareli were among his tutors. He was especially interested in the history of the Georgian state and law, and in 1905, he successfully defended his Ph. D. thesis, focused on the state structure of early Georgia and Armenia. Yet, Dzhavakhishvili was a man of very broad knowledge and fairly wide scholarly interests. In the year after his dissertation came out in 1905, he published a booklet on the political movements in Georgia in the 19th century. The censors considered this book too radical. All its copies were eliminated, and the author was brought to trial. In the meantime, Dzhavakhishvili labored to develop Georgian studies. From 1903 he gave lectures on the history of Georgia and Armenia in St. Petersburg University, and sometimes even in Georgia during his brief visits there. In 1907, he founded a seminar for students concentrating on Georgian studies, and in 1917, he resettled to Tbilisi and became among the founders of Tbilisi University, which opened on January 26, 1918. In 1919-1926, Dzhavakhishvili was the rector of the University, and then a professor there until the end of his days. Only for a brief period in 1931 – 1933, during the time of the “Marxist revolution” in the historical field did Dzhavakhishvili lose his connections with the University. Then he worked as the chairman of a department in the Georgian Pedagogical Institute. He was reinstated as a university professor after that, however. From 1931, he collaborated with the State Museum of Georgia, where he was the Chairman of the Department of History from 1936. During his last few years, Dzhavakhishvili was highly respected in Georgia. He was elected a deputy and a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR in 1938, and a member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1939.

In the early 1950s, the former N. Ya. Marr Institute of Language, History and Material Culture was renamed the Dzhavakhishvili Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography. His four-volume “History of the Georgian people” was one of his major works. Contemporary Georgian scholars regard it as the first attempt to create a scholarly version of Georgian history. During his later years, Dzhavakhishvili focused entirely on the ethnogenesis of the Georgian people. Actually, this issue had attracted him since his trip to the Sinai in 1902 in search of Georgian manuscripts. He directed an ambitious archaeological project in Mtskheta-Samtavro that commenced in the late 1930s (Dzhanashia 1941; Melikishvili 1976, 1986; Dzhorbenadze 1984). It is worth noting that the Mtskheta archaeological project that was directed by Dzhavakhishvili and his former student Dzhanashia, served as the main training ground for future Georgian archaeologists (Lordkipanidze 1976: 4).

Dzhavakhishvili was struck by Hrozný’s achievements, especially after Hrozný gave lectures in Tbilisi at the very end of the 1930s. After that, it became evident that one could not but revise the former views of Georgian roots in the south. Dzhavakhishvili turned to the north, where the Scythian-Sarmatian nomads came to Transcaucasia across the Caucasian Mountain ridge. He believed that the Abkhazians had come to Colchis from the north, and he was curious if the

Kartvelian ancestors could have arrived from that direction as well. Indeed, Marr was inclined to identify the Colchians with the Scythians; he included the Tubals-Tibareni into this entity, and derived them from the northern Caucasus (Marr 1926: 147, 1938: 247). Curiously, whereas Strabo's evidence was interpreted by Khakhanov as proof of the southern origins of the Georgians (Khakhanov 1903: 4-8), Dzhavakhishvili referred to it with the aspiration of confirming Kartvelian affiliations with the Scythian-Sarmatian world (Dzhavakhishvili 1950: 228-229).

Yet, this seemingly promising approach clashed with a serious obstacle – the overwhelming view that the Scythians spoke an Iranian language. Dzhavakhishvili carried out a vast project aimed at the revision of the traditional etymologies; he analyzed a great number of epigraphic sources, tribal names and place names. He came to the conclusion that the Caucasian Scythian-Sarmatian world employed the lexicon of the North Caucasians. Most of this was of Adyghe origin, but Chechen and Lezghin elements were also present. Thus, the “Scythians and Sarmatians were part of the north Caucasian Adyghe-Chechen-Lezghin people”. Moreover, Dzhavakhishvili managed to find North Caucasian elements in Georgian place names, including both eastern and western Georgia. One could trace these sorts of tribal and place names even further down, in Caucasian Albania, on the one hand, and in Asia Minor, on the other hand. There were good grounds to relate this particular lexical stratum to the Hatti and proto-Chaldaei lexical materials! All of these linguistic data might serve as persuasive evidence of the vast territory occupied by the ancestors of the contemporary north Caucasian peoples in the remote past. They might have settled throughout all the Caucasus and the northern part of the Near East before the Indo-Europeans and the Kartvelians, let alone Turkic-speaking people arrived there. That is just how the issue is interpreted by historical linguists nowadays (Diakonov 1968: 10-22; Diakonov, Starostin 1988; Ivanov 1985)²⁷.

Yet, Dzhavakhishvili was by no means satisfied with this approach. He did his best to use his discoveries to return to the orthodox view! He argued that the “Scythian-Sarmatian” tribes moved to the Caucasus from the south and that neither the Tubal/Tibareni nor the Mushki/Meschi had anything to do with the Indo-European world (Dzhavakhishvili 1939, 1950)²⁸.

What relationship does all of this have to the Georgian ancestors? A most direct one! Indeed, by the late 1930s, the Georgian linguists had put forward a hypothesis of an Iberian-Caucasian relationship and constructed an Iberian-Caucasian language family, embracing both the Kartvelians and the North Caucasians (Chikobava 1952; Melikishvili 1976: 18)²⁹. Dzhavakhishvili was an ardent advocate of this approach (for that, see Melikishvili 1976: 18; Anchabadze 1976: 18; Dzhaparidze 1980: 22). As had been established further on, this hypothesis proved to be quite erroneous³⁰. However, it corresponded perfectly well to the Georgian political expansion of 1937-1953. Moreover, this made it easy for Georgian historians to appropriate the early past of the north Caucasian peoples (Marykhuba 1994b: 59).

Simon N. Dzhnashia (1900-1947) was a student of the Academician Dzhavakhishvili. He was born in the village of Makvaneti, to the family of the Georgian ethnographer, schoolteacher and public activist, N. S. Dzhnashia. In 1922, he graduated from the Department of History and Linguistics, Tbilisi State University, and then was a postgraduate student under professor Dzhavakhishvili. Beginning in 1926, he gave lectures on the history of Georgia and on the Abkhazian language at Tbilisi State University. In 1935 he was granted a professorship and appointed the Chairman of the Department of the History of Georgia. In 1936, he also became acting director of the newly established Institute of Languages and History of Material Culture (later the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR). His field of scholarly interests was as broad as that of his tutor. Although his doctoral thesis (1938) focused on the "Feudal Revolution in Georgia", he was interested not only in the history of Georgia, but also in the Caucasian highlanders in general, and he was fluent in Abkhazian. He initiated the largest archaeological studies in pre-war Georgia, carried out in Mtskheta and some other areas, which he directed starting in 1937. Dzhnashia made a valuable contribution to the development of Georgian scholarship. He was the founder of the Georgian Linguistic Society, the deputy president of the Georgian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (from 1939), and later he was awarded the title of Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (in 1941), and vice-president of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. In 1943, he was elected Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and, in 1946, was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. For his scholarly and organizational merits, he was awarded two Orders of Lenin, and was twice a Stalin Prize winner (Dzhnashia, 1948; *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk SSSR*, 1948, t. 5, N 1: 107-108; Melikishvili, Lomtadze 1949).

Dzhnashia was searching for Kartvelian ancestors among the well-known peoples of the early Near East no less persistently than his teacher. He remarked that the earliest civilizations of the Near East were founded by people who had nothing to do with the Indo-Europeans, Semites or Turks, and listed the most remote Kartvelian ancestors among those early people. In particular, he did his best to relate them to the Hittites and was convinced that the Kartvelian ancestors could have played an outstanding role in early Asia Minor. He argued that they had arrived in Transcaucasia from the south, settled in Armenia before the Armenians and in Abkhazia before the Abkhazians. He assumed that the Georgian alphabet was invented in the 7th century B.C. and that when the Kartvelians arrived in Georgia they already had their own writing system. In order to prove his hypotheses, he tried to mobilize archaeological data. He referred to the "Koban'-Colchian culture" of the Late Bronze Age which, in his view, was developed by the Georgian ancestors³¹). Apparently, all of this made Dzhnashia reject Hrozy's idea of an Indo-European affiliation of the Hittites (Dzhnashia 1959a, 1959b, 1991: 18). At the same time, like Dzhavakhishvili, he shared the idea of Iberian-Caucasian

language relationships and found numerous Adyghe lexical elements in Georgian place names and even lexicon (Dzhanashia 1959c: 81-123). The idea of close relationships with the North Caucasian peoples helped Georgian historians to construct a great early history of the Georgian people, which would otherwise have been a difficult task.

What about Abkhazia? What was its role in early history, in the views of Georgian historians of the late 1930s – 1940s? In those days, Dzhanashia was considered the major expert in the field, and he kept developing the orthodox Georgian approach while enriching it with new, mainly archaeological, data. He believed that Georgian history began in the Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages. To this end, he identified the Colchians of the classical authors with the bearers of the “Koban’-Colchian archaeological culture” and, following Kuftin (Kuftin 1949: 135, map), located it between the Terek River in the north and Trebizond in the southwest³²). With reference to the classical authors, Dzhanashia depicted early Colchis as a prosperous country, rich in natural resources, in particular, gold. While mentioning the early Greek city-states in Colchis, Dzhanashia assumed that the local inhabitants themselves were creating their own cities and minting their “colchidki” coins³³). To put it briefly, he shared his teacher’s idea that the early Colchian state developed side by side with the Greek colonies. It goes without saying that he identified the population of this state as the remote Georgian ancestors.

Dzhanashia identified the Abkhazians with the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, who were first mentioned by classical writers in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D. Yet, he avoided discussing the issue of when and how they arrived on the Colchis seashore. This might seem less important to him, as he included the Abkhazians in the same ethnic community as the Georgians and other Caucasian peoples; there was no question of different origins for the Abkhazians. This contrasted with what Bakradze and Khakhanov had written. Dzhanashia called Lazica, or Egrisi, (4th – 6th centuries A.D.) the first medieval kingdom in Colchis. He said it was dominant there for some time. Later on, the role of Lazica declined as a result of continuous wars against external enemies and ultimately subordination to Byzantium (Dzhanashia 1991: 18-40).

At the same time, the Abkhazian Principality got stronger in the 8th century, as it suffered less from foreign invasions and managed to use to its benefit the problems that were exhausting Byzantium. Concerning the aggressive foreign policies of the Abkhazian kings, Dzhanashia believed that they met contemporary demands and served to unify Georgia, as though this had already been the goal of the Lazica rulers. In his view, Abkhazia had fallen into decline by the end of the 10th century, and Bagrat III, the stepson of the Tao-Klargeti ruler, had completed the unification of Georgia. Abkhazia constituted his “inheritance from his mother’s side” (Dzhanashia 1952, 1991: 40-48).

Thus, the history of Abkhazia was an integral part of the overall history of Georgia, in Dzhanashia’s works. Yet, Dzhanashia’s approach included several

points that had to be appreciated by the Abkhazians. These were that the Apsilae and the Abasgoi moved from the southeast to the northwest, rather than vice-versa in early medieval times (Dzhanashia 1991: 39), that the term Apsilae was closely related to the Abkhazian self-designation "Apswa", and that Queen Tamar's son was nicknamed "Lasha" which derived from the Abkhazian term for "light" (Dzhanashia 1991: 24). All of this proved that the Abkhazians were the early settlers at the territory of Abkhazia and played an important role in the Georgian state.

At the meantime, as in other republics, the Georgian scholars were ordered to write a "History of Georgia". The best historians were involved in this project, and the first version of the volume was completed by the Academician Dzhavakhishvili and his students, S. Dzhanashia and N. Berdzenishvili, in 1941. Those chapters that dealt with the early and medieval periods up to the 10th century A.D. were written by Dzhanashia. A revised version of this work was published in Georgian in 1946 and approved as the standard textbook for secondary schools (for the Russian edition, see Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950).

The textbook took an intentional primordialist approach, and began the history of Georgia from Palaeolithic times, as was common for this sort of publication. It depicted the teleological process of the consolidation of Georgian tribes around a national cultural core represented by Kartli, which ultimately resulted in the emergence of the Georgian nation. There was no explanation as to why they had consolidated at all or why Kartli served as the core. In any case, political factors were neglected by the authors, and the primary role of cultural-religious factors was emphasized instead. Yet, nothing was said about the fact that western Georgia enjoyed use of the Greek language and writing system, and was in the ecclesiastical sphere of Byzantium in early medieval times, while a different Church eparchy developed in eastern Georgia. Instead, Dzhanashia went so far as to maintain that literate people of the 6th – 7th centuries identified Kartli with both eastern Georgia and Egrisi. (This was during the period when Kartli was dependent on Persia, whereas Lazica was subordinated to Byzantium! V. Sh.). While referring to external medieval sources, the authors included the Abkhazians and the Ossetians rather than only the Georgians in the "national cultural Georgian entity" (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 7). In search of the earliest Georgian ancestors, Dzhanashia had constructed some "Hittite-Iberian entity" which he identified with the Yaphetic family of languages established by Marr and revised by the Georgian linguist, A. Chikobava (for that, see Dzhaparidze 1980: 25). He identified the Georgian ancestors with the "Hittite-Subareans", who settled from Asia Minor to northern Mesopotamia and Transcaucasia in the 2nd Millennium B.C. Thus, the glorious history of the Hittites, Hyksos, and Mittani was ascribed to the Georgian ancestors (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 16-18)³⁴.

The textbook represented the orthodox view that the Mushki (Meschi) and Tubals were Georgian ancestors, and emphasized that they had enriched humanity by the invention of iron metallurgy. The state of Urartu was declared an early

Georgian state in fact (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 32-38). It is worth noting that, while being already aware of the two different cultural zones (western and eastern) in Transcaucasia in the Late Bronze Age, Dzhanashia still argued that the Caucasus was occupied by a homogeneous “Hittite-Subarean entity” at that time (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 23-31)³⁵.

The Colchians were simply called a “west Georgian tribe” and associated with the Colchian Kingdom, as though it had flourished at the time of Greek colonization and had its capital in the city of Aea on the Phasis (Rioni) River. The name of the capital was borrowed from the Argonaut myth. The “colchidki”, silver coins supposedly minted by the local rulers, were referred to as confirmation of this view. The Hellenistic Kingdom of Pontus was called Georgian for, in Dzhanashia’s view, Georgians accounted for the bulk of its population. That is why he appreciated victorious wars and territorial annexations made by its ruler, Mithridates VI Eupator (115-63 B.C.), in the very end of the 2nd – early 1st centuries B.C. While discussing the nature of Colchis’ population in the first centuries A.D. and enumerating various local tribes, including the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, Dzhanashia called them the “Colchian people”. The Abkhazian ancestors were not distinguished as a separate group³⁶.

It is worth noting that Dzhanashia was not satisfied with quite reliable evidence of the early Georgian writing system being introduced in the Early Middle Ages. He did his best to convince the reader that the Georgians enjoyed their own “early pagan writing system” (hieroglyphs and cuneiform!) in pre-Christian times, which had left no traces (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 92-95). Further on, Dzhanashia set forth the version of the political history of, first, Lazica and, then, the Abkhazian Kingdom, already known to us, and added certain details, which strengthened its Georgiacentric character. In particular, he argued that, already in the early medieval time, regardless of the political environment, the Kingdom of Kartli successfully disseminated among its neighbors both the Georgian language and its system of writing, which, he emphasized, were “easily borrowed by related Georgian tribes”. He wrote of the cultural rapprochement between Kartli and Egrisi, giving no explanation of why or how this could develop (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 138). Indeed, the dominant majority in Egrisi was made of Mingrelians, who were rather different from the Kartvelians in language (for details, see Hewitt 1995a).

Dzhanashia called the Abkhazian Kingdom the “west Georgian state” and maintained that the Georgian tribes of the Karts, Mingrelians and Svans accounted for the bulk of its population. In his view, the name “Abkhazian” was given to the state after its dynasty, but he did not explain why the dynasty had that name. Moreover, he argued that the south Georgian Principality of Tao-Klargeti had played a major part in the final unification of Georgia, and he was more interested in this particular principality than in Abkhazia. Dzhanashia emphasized that Georgian began to dominate in bureaucratic matters, the liturgy and belles-lettres in Abkhazia by the 9th century (Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950:

152-165). At the same time, it was not ever mentioned in the textbook that the title of the Georgian Kings started with the name "King of the Abkhazians", and the nickname of Queen Tamar's son, Lasha, was given no explanation at all. At the same time, these latter points were of great importance to the Abkhazians. It goes without saying that the Abkhazians were entirely neglected in later chapters, and the South Ossetians enjoyed no place at all in this textbook.

To put it differently, the textbook aimed at painting a picture of a uniform Georgian nation, and ethnic minorities should not place obstacles in the way of developing that picture³⁷). Moreover, in order to build up the great early history of Georgia, the authors did not hesitate to use conjecture and exaggeration, and they also appropriated the past of early peoples who had nothing to do with the Georgians. They transferred the other peoples' territories to Georgia and, in fact, carried out a Georgian historiographic expansion that was in accordance with the fact that Georgia had been granted the lands of several North Caucasian peoples (the Karachais, Chechens and Ingush) who had been deported in 1944 (for that, see Suny 1988: 289; Dunlop 1998: 73). It is apparent that the idea of Iberian-Caucasian relationships also served as ideological grounds for this sort of policy.

The view of early Georgian history, having been analysed, was greatly appreciated in Georgia. A pamphlet on Soviet Georgia was published in Moscow in 1948. In this publication, the Georgians were included in the "Hittite-Iberian group", as though the latter had enjoyed the vast territory from Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia up to the Caucasian Mountain ridge. The "Hittite-Subarean tribes" were called the founders of the Urartian state, whose Chaldaean population was identified with the Georgians. The Georgian writing system was displayed as an achievement of pre-Christian times. The emergence of the Iberian and Colchian Kingdoms was dated to the 6th century B.C., and all their population was identified solely with the Georgian ancestors. The Georgians were called a "gifted people" who not only persistently and successfully struggled against various invaders, but also brought forward a whole group of outstanding poets, philosophers and architects. There was no room for the Abkhazian people in this glorious history (Khachapuridze 1948: 7-10).

It is well known how thoroughly and critically Soviet ideologists analyzed the textbook on the history of the Kazakh SSR and others of this sort of textbook in the 1940s (for example, see Tillett 1969: 70-76). Nothing like this was observed with respect to the Georgian textbook, although the preliminary version had come out two years before the Kazakh one did. By contrast, its publication was accompanied by a series of generous reviews. It is obvious that the attitude of the Soviet authorities toward the history of Georgia was different from, say, the history of Kazakhstan or the Ukraine. In fact, Georgian historiographic expansion in all its details followed the example of Russian historiography of those days (for the latter, see Shnirelman 1995a; 1996a). It is also instructive to note that the campaign in the struggle against "bourgeois nationalism" waged in Georgia in the fall of 1952 did not affect Georgian historians (Suny 1988: 289-290). Apparently, the Russian and

Georgian historians were allowed to do what was forbidden to any of their counterparts in the USSR. One of the reasons for this sympathy to the Georgian historical myth from the side of the Soviet authorities, regardless of its obvious migrationist basis, was the character of Soviet foreign policy in the late 1940s. Indeed, as was already noted, after the western USSR borderlands were successfully expanded, Stalin was dreaming of new territorial annexations at the expense of southern neighbors (Chuev 1991: 55-56). We already know of the anti-Iranian and anti-Turkish campaigns inspired by Soviet authorities among the Armenians and the Azeris.

It was just at that time that the Tbilisi newspaper, "Komunisti", published an article by major Georgian historians, the Academicians Dzhnashia and Berdzenishvili, who, having been the authors of the approach in question, claimed the Turkish lands east of Trebizond and north of Erzurum, as all this territory constituted a genuine Georgian heritage. With reference to history, they strove to demonstrate that Georgian ethnic territory had always covered the region between the Greater Caucasus and the Greater Taurus Mountains. They also maintained that the "Hittites and the Subareans, the direct ancestors of the Georgian people, dominated the Near East". They called the state of Urartu the stronghold of "Georgian civilization" and argued that, after it had fallen, the Georgian people still managed to found new political centers, which gradually shifted northward. Besides Colchis and Iberia, the authors referred to some state of the Saspis and made it one of the largest Near Eastern states of Herodotus' time (Herodotus knew nothing of this state! V. Sh.). The Laz, or Chans, who still live in northeastern Turkey, were viewed by the authors as direct descendants of the early Colchis population and heirs of the medieval Trebizond Empire. They also pointed to the great political importance of the southwest Georgian principality of Tao-Klargeti for the formation of the united Georgian state, and represented "Southern Georgia", which makes up part of contemporary Turkey, as if it was the cradle of the Georgian culture. The Turkish people were represented as mere barbarians who brought about only death and destruction. The authors stated that the Georgians had never abdicated their southern lands, which served as the "cradle of our folk individuality", and maintained that heavy Georgian losses at the time of World War II granted them the right to claim lands that had been illegally annexed by Turkey (Dzhnashia, Berdzenishvili 1945).

Having been first published in the major newspaper of the Georgian Communist Party, the article was immediately republished by central Soviet media – the newspapers "Pravda", "Izvestia", "Krasnaia zvezda". All this proved that the campaign had been thoroughly planned by Party officials. It was no accident that the main ideas of the article were reproduced by the Secretary of the CC CPG, Charkviani, in his own article, devoted to the 25th jubilee of Soviet Georgia. While glorifying Soviet Georgia, he complained that at least one age-old dream of the Georgian people was still unrealized, namely the "restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia". He enumerated those Turkish territories that had to be given

back to the Georgians (for that, see Khachapuridze 1948: 14).

Western political scientists point out that the tense Soviet-Turkish negotiations were carried on at that time, and assume that the resounding irredentist campaign had been launched in order to put pressure on Turkey (Kolarz 1952: 234; Kuniholm 1980: 287). Without playing down this factor, one has every reason to assume that Stalin really had in mind the territorial expansion of the USSR at the expense of Turkey and Iran³⁸). It is worth mentioning that passion about the southern lands excited Georgia for several years, and met with sympathy in Moscow. Indeed, a few years later the same historians published a pamphlet focused on claims for Turkish lands. A major Soviet historical magazine emphasized that, while claiming that the lands had been illegally taken by Turkey, Dzhanashia expressed the view of the entire Soviet Georgian population (Dzhanashia 1948). The well-known Georgian poet, Grigol Abashidze, had composed a poem glorifying the lands of the old Georgian province of Tao, which were located in Turkish territory. For that, he was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1950. Yet, the annexation of Turkish land never came to pass.

In the meantime, internal policy developed more successfully. Indeed, the historical views formed in 1937-1939 were in perfect accordance with the plans of the Georgian authorities, aimed at the Georgianization of the Abkhazians and their integration into a homogeneous Georgian community. Simultaneously, they had to end Abkhazian aspirations to build up their own distinctive historical viewpoint. That is why the Soviet authorities got fairly suspicious about the activities of the Abkhazian Research Institute, whose staff was accused of the “study of cultural issues in the manner of bourgeois nationalism” (Clogg 1995: 184). They recollected in the KGB Ashkhatsava’s and Basaria’s ill-fated books and condemned them as anti-Georgian and counterrevolutionary (Clogg 1995: 182-183). Yet, since their authors had already been eliminated, Dmitry Gulia’s “History of Abkhazia” turned out to be their main target. First, it was still fairly popular among the Abkhazians, particularly due to the great reputation of its author, and second, it was a challenge to the Georgians, who treated it as an attack against their virtue. The authorities thought that Gulia himself should retract the book. However, he was brave enough to reject this sort of suggestion. Ultimately, in 1951, the then Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the Abkhazian ASSR, M. K. Delba, ordered the publication of a pamphlet called “About my Book, the History of Abkhazia” under the name of Gulia. The pamphlet was completed under pressure of the KGB and sent to all the required addresses. When Gulia was asked who would be able to write this sort of pamphlet, he recommended Sh. D. Inal-Ipa quite highly, and the latter had to take this responsibility. However his criticism of Gulia’s book was considered too mild, and Delba practically rewrote the review from the very beginning. Later on, Inal-Ipa recalled that he was unable to recognize his own text when he read a published copy³⁹). When the political climate relaxed, Dmitry Gulia was able to state that the pamphlet had been falsified. Delba tried to justify his own actions by saying that the pamphlet had been completed and published in order to rescue Gulia from

repression (Gulia 1962: 219-221). Indeed, Gulia was already being watched by the KGB as early as 1946, and was threatened with execution (Smyr 1994: 17-18; Clogg 1995: 179).

Yet, it is doubtful that Delba, being cynical, like many Soviet bureaucrats, cared very much about the Abkhazian people or their poet⁴⁰. Indeed, while the head of the Abkhazian People's Commissariat of Education during the worst period, he actively participated in the elaboration and implementation of the destructive school reforms that took place from the end of the 1930s. He also played an active role in the trial against "Lakoba's followers" in the fall of 1937 (Lakoba 1990: 132-133; Marykhuba 1996a: 118, 122). This did not provide him much security, and he was also kept under watch by the KGB. They suspected him of "counterrevolutionary activities" only because, while the Director of the Abkhazian Glavlit (Publishing Committee) he had not stopped the publication of Gulia's, Ashkhatsava's and Basaria's books. In 1947, with leading Abkhazian intellectuals, Delba entered the list of "bourgeois nationalists" compiled in the KGB (Clogg 1995: 184, 187).

At the same time, Delba, while criticizing Marr's ideas in 1951, came out against the "erroneousness and fallaciousness of ... the isolation of both the Abkhazian language and the history of the Abkhazians from the Georgian language and the history of Georgia". In his view, one of Marr's worst errors was that the latter avoided treating the "Abkhazians as a Georgian tribe". By contrast, Delba himself argued that the "Abkhazians as a Georgian tribe were an integral part of the Georgian people throughout all their history" (Delba 1952).

This idea was at the core of the pamphlet that had been published in Gulia's name. Abkhazia was treated there as an "inseparable part of Georgia", and had to enjoy the place of a satellite, as though it was preoccupied only with the dream of building a "national Georgian state". The pamphlet's author abandoned all the conclusions of the "History of Abkhazia", not only those that had proved to be obsolete (like the Abkhazian origins in Ethiopia, and identification of the term "Abyssinia" with "Apsny"), but also those supported by major Georgian scholars (like Adyghe-Abkhazian place names in Georgia). He certainly revised the views that threw into doubt the historical superiority of the Georgians in Abkhazia (like those of the non-Kartvelian origins of the early Colchis inhabitants, the cultural backwardness of the interior Georgian tribes with respect to the Abkhazian shore dwellers, etc.).

The pamphlet reproduced the Messianic version of early Georgian history that was developed by Georgian historians of those days. It told of the extensive settlement of the early Georgians throughout the Near East and Transcaucasia, of their civilizing activities and construction of many cultural centers, of their genetic links with the Hittites and Chaldaei, of the Georgian identity of the Colchians, and of an independent Georgian state, as though the latter had emerged long before the Christian era (for example, see Pirtskhalava 1948; Khachapuridze 1948: 7-10). The Abkhazian Kingdom was viewed as a "west Georgian state" that worked very hard to unite all the Georgian tribes within one "national state". While appreciating the

ideological climate of those days, the author attacked German historians and linguists, whose ideas had once been referred to by Gulia. The pamphlet openly stated that the “Abkhazians were Georgians”. With reference to the aforementioned article by Dzhnashia and Berdzenishvili, the Turkish people were represented as bloodthirsty enemies of the Georgians. During the period of the forcible Georgianization of the Abkhazians, the author turned against the “Turkish assimilators”, represented by Kelesh-bey, the Abkhazian ruler of the very late 18th – very early 19th centuries, as a “traitor” whose aspiration was to partition Georgia (Gulia 1951). It is worth mentioning in passing that Kelesh-bey is still highly respected by the Abkhazians (for example, see Basaria 1923: 140; Fadeev 1934: 142-145; Inal-Ipa 1965: 145; Lakoba 1990: 8-9, 1993: 159-161, 1998a: 67-68; Smyr 1994: 11).

Later on, Gulia told in his autobiography how they impeded his studies of Abkhazian history and ethnology. Through a decision by the Bureau of the Abkhazian branch of the CPG, this autobiography was eliminated in 1956, together with all copies of the magazine, “Alashara” (“Dawn”), where it was published (Smyr 1994: 18). They also failed to publish Delba’s letter of October 1, 1953, addressed to the Abkhazian Branch of the CPG, in which he recognized his guilt for the composition of the aforementioned pamphlet and asked to withdraw it from circulation (Marykhuba 1994a: 96-97).

At that very time, while the campaign against Gulia’s book was expanding in Abkhazia, the Tbilisi magazine, “Mnatobi”, began to publish separate chapters of Pavle Ingoroqva’s book “Giorgi Merchule – a Georgian writer of the 10th century” in 1949-1951. The book itself, more than 1,000 pages in length, had come out in 1954 (Ingoroqva 1954). In view of certain scholars, the book was written by order of the KGB and was to serve as the scholarly groundwork for the resettlement of the Abkhazians out of Abkhazia (Lakoba 1990a: 97-98; 2000: 17; Lezhava 1997: 175-178). The Abkhazians’ origins were discussed in its fourth chapter. In fact, it completed the process of the historiographic Georgianization of the Abkhazians. Indeed, whereas Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhnashia included the early Abkhazians in the Georgian entity, they did not infringe on the distinction of Abkhazian language and culture. By contrast, Ingoroqva identified the Apsilae as a “Georgian tribe with a Georgian dialect” and maintained that only Georgian tribes lived in Abkhazia in the 8th century A.D. (Ingoroqva 1954: 116)⁴¹. He also argued that the Georgians-Moschi gradually began to call themselves the Abkhazians (Ingoroqva 1954: 129, 137). Whereas Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhnashia recognized that the Abkhazians lived in Colchis in the classical period, Ingoroqva refused to locate them there until late in the Middle Ages; instead, he claimed that they arrived in Abkhazia from out of the great Caucasian mountain ridge in the 17th century (Ingoroqva 1954: 188. Also see “Mnatobi”, 1950, N 3: 146-189)⁴². Whereas Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhnashia revealed a substantial Adyghe-Abkhazian substratum among Georgian place names, Ingoroqva radically revised their conclusions and did his best to prove that even the Abkhazian place names in Abkhazia were of Georgian origin⁴³.

The view in question was not anything new for Ingoroqva. Indeed, as early as 1918, he took an active part in the hot territorial dispute growing between the newly established states in Transcaucasia. Naturally, his conclusions were favorable to Georgia. In particular, he called the Abkhazians a “Georgian tribe” in his report “On the Georgian Borders” (Lezhava 1997: 175-178)⁴⁴.

Ingoroqva’s book enjoyed several generous reviews in the Georgian media. One of them was written by the Academician G. S. Axvlediani, who appreciated most of all the fact that Ingoroqva represented the Abkhazians as a Kartvelian tribe, and the Abkhazian Kingdom as a Georgian state. Henceforth, there was no place for aliens in the Georgian political process! “The Georgian state of western Georgia was founded by no means by any alien tribe (as a result of invasion), but was built up by Georgian tribes, the Georgian tribe of the Abkhazians being among them”, the Academician concluded. He also praised Ingoroqva, because the latter included the place names of Abkhazia in the “Kartvelian language world” (Akhvlediani 1955). In 1956-1957, the magazine, “Mnatobi”, arranged a discussion of Ingoroqva’s volume, which demonstrated that several well-known Georgian historians and philologists (a Director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR, N. Berdzenishvili, as well as L. Kobakhidze, S. Kaukhchishvili, G. Axvlediani) shared his anti-Abkhazian stance. Several Georgian writers also supported Ingoroqva. Only the philologist, K. Lomtadze, dared to oppose the collective opinion of her colleagues (for that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 130-131; Lezhava 1997: 174-175; Hewitt 1998: 119). Since that time it became common among Georgian historians to treat the names “Bichvinta” (the Greek term for Pityus which means “pine place”) and Heniokhoi (the Greek term for “charioteer”) as genuine Georgian terms, which is implausible from a linguistic point of view (Hewitt 1998: 118-119, 121).

Ingoroqva’s volume met with the opposite response among Abkhazians, who regarded it as an aspiration to “eliminate the national distinctions of the Abkhazian people” once again (Marykhuba 1994a: 124). Thoughtful Abkhazian authors did not fail to notice that Ingoroqva had radically revised his former approach by the beginning of the 1950s. Indeed, ten years earlier he had recognized the important role of the Abkhazians in the building of the Georgian state (Anchabadze 1956: 264, 273; Inal-Ipa 1965: 19, 1976: 50-51; Lakoba, Shamba 1989). They accused him of a tendentious approach, intentionally keeping silence or distorting historical evidence, implausible assumptions, revision of his own earlier ideas, and trust in highly dubious sources of information. In fact, the Abkhazians blamed Ingoroqva for the fact that he deprived them of their ethnic name and early history (Soselia 1955; Anchabadze 1956; Bgazhba 1956; Marykhuba 1994a: 129). As one of the Abkhazian critics concluded, the “Abkhazians, an indigenous people of the region, became homeless. They turned out to be not Abkhazians in the full meaning of this term but Apswas, who were also neglected in P. Ingoroqva’s voluminous book” (Bgazhba 1956: 283).

Ingoroqva’s book came out too late – the Stalin era was over, mighty Beria had

left the historical scene, and the Abkhazians realized that the time was ripe for a struggle for the improvement of their position. Indignant people began to send letters to Party and Soviet authorities, a political scandal was imminent, and officials strove to prevent this development. A meeting of the CC CPG was held on April 12, 1954, where they made a decision to withdraw Ingoroqva's book. However, the latter was defended by the Georgian scholars. Then the Abkhazians changed their strategy and began to send letters to the CC CPSU complaining that the right of the Abkhazian people for survival had been violated. In April 1957, they organized public protests in Sukhumi in front of the Abkhazian branch of the CPG. This made the CC CPG retreat on Ingoroqva's book. The publication of the discussion in "Mnatobi" magazine was condemned (*Za marksistsko-leninskuiu razrabotku* 1957), the wave of generous reviews was blocked, and their authors as well as the editors of the respective media suffered Party punishment. The ideas of Ingoroqva and the like became taboo (Lezhava 1997: 180-183; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 144, note 112).

At the same time, the condemnation of Ingoroqva's concepts by the Georgian authorities was rather formal: although the ideas themselves were recognized as erroneous, it was still unclear which errors, in particular, were made by Ingoroqva. His followers were condemned but their names were not mentioned. Only N. Berdzenishvili was openly criticized, yet for his wrong views on the "history of the formation of the Georgian nation" rather than for his distortions of Abkhazian history. What was wrong with the views of the well-known Georgian historian remained unknown to readers of the Georgian Communist newspapers and magazines. Nothing was said about how one should represent the history of Abkhazia (*Za marksistsko-leninskuiu razrabotku* 1957). To put it differently, the Georgian authorities made a formal demagogic reply that did not convince anybody. That is why Ingoroqva's ideas stayed alive in Georgia, although it was inappropriate to commit them to paper in the Soviet period. Only in 1989 did the Georgian writers demand the rehabilitation of Ingoroqva and his scholarly heritage (for that, see Hewitt 1998: 120). Since then, Ingoroqva's ideas have become very popular in Georgia, as we will see further on.

CHAPTER 4

ETERNAL GEORGIA

Not only did the political climate change radically in the early 1950s; Soviet scholarship enjoyed a drastic transformation, as well. First, Marr's heritage was finally abandoned; second, the linguistic situation in the early Near East became much clearer; third, extensive archaeological studies provided a lot of new materials for the reinterpretation of the early Georgian past, and archaeologists demanded serious consideration of their constructions.

Until the 1940s, the archaeological map of Georgia was covered with many lacunae; it was impossible to construct any clear pattern of cultural evolution in Transcaucasia with the very scarce data at hands; and the latter were ignored by historians, who were stuck to the migrationist approach. For example, the view was popular that the cultures of the early metallurgists had arrived in the Southern Caucasus from outside only at the turn of the 1st Millennium B.C. It is in this respect that historians were fascinated by all those Moschi, Tubals, Chalybes and others who have been already discussed. Meanwhile, a lot of new archaeological data were accumulated by the early 1940s, which made it possible to check how they corresponded to the orthodox historical views. The first who made this attempt was the outstanding Soviet archaeologist, B. A. Kuftin.

Boris A. Kuftin (1892-1953), who began his scholarly career as a specialist on the central region of Russia, suffered from the political repressions of the very late 1920s and was exiled from Moscow to Vologda, Northern Russia. Georgian colleagues helped him to move to Georgia in 1934, where he was first hired to process archaeological materials at the State Museum of Georgia, in order to prepare an archaeological exhibition. In 1934 – 1935, he took part in the ambitious Abkhazian archaeological project directed by the Academician I. I. Meshchaninov and attempted the first extensive archaeological survey of Abkhazia. Then, Kuftin himself continued these studies in the late 1930s and the late 1940s. Simultaneously, he made excavations in the Upper Khrami River Valley, where he discovered the brilliant Trialeti culture of the Middle Bronze Age. Thus, he proved to be a very experienced archaeologist who, in fact, developed the foundation of contemporary prehistoric archaeology in Georgia (Formozov 1995: 47, 71).

In particular, Kuftin discovered the Bronze Age of Georgia, which proved to be very rich and long lasting, which was a surprise to orthodox historians. Kuftin claimed that the orthodox schema needed radical revision. First, a long cultural

continuity, having been revealed by the archaeologists, advanced the issue of the local roots of the Georgian people. Second, although archaeologists had confirmed the early relationships of the local Transcaucasian culture with its southern neighbors, these contacts proved to be established with Mesopotamia rather than with Asia Minor, in contrast to what the orthodox historians taught. Third, Kuftin distinguished between two different cultural regions in the Caucasus during the Bronze Age – western and southeastern. He related the former to those “Adyghe” place names, which had been established by Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhanasia (Kuftin 1944, 1949: 317-318)⁴⁵). While he assumed that the southeastern region (Southern Georgia, Armenia and, partly, Azerbaijan) might be related to the Kartvelians, the western one had nothing to do with them – only ancestors of the Abkhazian-Adyghe peoples could have lived there in the Bronze Age! And the classical authors located the Tibareni, Meschi and Colchians in the western region.

Yet Kuftin himself did not take his conclusion to its logical end; obviously, the contemporary intellectual and political environment made this inappropriate. Moreover, while following Marr, he first wrote about the continuous replacement of “socio-economic layers”. The “Koban’-Colchian culture” was associated by him with the “Spero-Iberian-Cimmerian world” which he identified with the “Iberians-Mingrelians”. The “Colchian ethnic layer” of the Early Iron Age was identified with the Mingrelians-Chans”. He interpreted the “Spero-Iberian substratum” as the basis for both the “Kartlian-Imeretian people” and the “Abasgian-Ovso-Svanic-Khevsuric tribal entity” which gave birth to the Abkhazian people, later on. Concerning the famous dolmen culture of the Early Bronze Age discovered in Abkhazia, Kuftin came to the following conclusion: “It is impossible to find any correspondence between this early population and the later tribes and peoples acting in history or living [in the region] nowadays who were subsequently formed”. Yet, he believed that one could relate the pre-Koban’ period to the “Pelagian layer” if only arbitrarily (Kuftin 1949: 233-236, 289, 311-322). It seems that the latter hypothesis predicted the entity that is called the North Caucasian family of languages by contemporary historical linguists. In any case, it is obvious that ideas about the correspondence between archaeological sites and linguistic groups were fairly obscure in the late 1930s. Kuftin was wrong in certain respects, his views were quite inconsistent in some other respects, but he predicted some things quite correctly.

He believed that the “east Georgian tribes” assimilated the “west Georgian” ones over the Middle and Late Bronze Age, and that there were numerous Georgian tribal groups in the territory of Georgia on the eve of Greek colonization. In any case, Kuftin’s concepts proved to be highly autochthonous, in contrast to the popular migrationist approach. He argued that not only the Georgian state but also the Georgian peoples themselves had roots mainly in the territory of Georgia; the southern newcomers took some part in the formation of the Georgian people, but their role was by no means decisive (Kuftin 1944, 1949: 2-3, 311). It took some time before Georgian historians accepted this conclusion. Yet, after the political

changes of the 1950s – 1970s it became the dominant one in Georgia (Melikishvili 1986: 58; Dzhaparidze 1980: 29; Lordkipanidze 1989: 16-17).

The new epoch demanded its own heroes. Since the early 1950s, Georgy A. Melikishvili (born 1918) became the major expert in the early history of Georgia. He was a man of the new generation, a well-trained historian, highly knowledgeable about dead languages. He graduated from Tbilisi State University in 1939, where the well-known Georgian historians, S. N. Dzhanelidze and G. V. Tsereteli, were among his tutors. Melikishvili had become a highly respected expert in the history of the early Near East and Transcaucasia by the 1950s. His doctoral thesis (1954) focused on the Near Eastern sources of early Transcaucasian history. In 1957, he was awarded the Lenin Prize for his studies on the state of Urartu, and he was elected an Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR in 1960. In 1965, he became the Director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. He was also engaged in teaching. In 1944, he began giving lecture courses at Tbilisi State University (Melikishvili 1979).

Melikishvili was the first Georgian historian to develop a concept of early Georgian history on the basis of the autochthonous approach with reference to archaeological data. For the first time, in June 1951, he presented his views in a paper given at the meeting of the Division of Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR held as part of the all-Union campaign launched at that time against Marrism. In formal terms, the paper dealt with the history of the Georgian people in general, but in fact it was focused on the earliest periods of this history only. Quite paradoxically, while attacking Marr's views, the speaker developed autochthonist ideas, which were most of all advocated by Marr himself. Melikishvili called on his colleagues to give up migrationist concepts and search for the roots of the Georgian people primarily within the territory of Georgia⁴⁶. He shared the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis and argued that the Kartvelian languages were related to the North Caucasian ones (for details, see Melikishvili 1959: 94-97)⁴⁷. At the same time, the matter was not just a linguistic issue. True, in contrast to his predecessors, Melikishvili avoided identifying the Urartians and the Hittites with the Georgians. Yet he argued that assimilated groups that had lost their former languages, shifted to a Georgian one and made a substantial contribution to the formation of the Georgian people had to be identified as Georgians. Since some Hittite, Urartian and Hurrian tribes had been integrated into the Georgian unity, the Georgian people had every reason to consider themselves the "heirs of the Hittite and Hurrian-Urartian culture" (Melikishvili 1952: 11). This is how the orthodox Georgian historical concepts together with their political connotations once again gained a chance to survive! Indeed, in this view, it was sufficient to assimilate an ethnic minority in order to claim its culture and historical heritage. It is no accident that, while evaluating various ethnic characteristics, Melikishvili gave superiority to language (Melikishvili 1952: 5). It is difficult to avoid relating this approach to the continuous attempts of the Georgian authorities to Georgianize the Abkhazians.

True, Melikishvili's concept demonstrated important differences in respect to the orthodox views. While still identifying the Mushki, Chalybes, Colchians and other aforementioned groups with the early Georgians, this concept viewed them not as indigenous peoples of Asia Minor, but as newcomers from Transcaucasia, where the true and eternal Georgian Motherland was situated. The author linked these extensive resettlements with the decline of the state of Urartu, as if the powerful Georgian unity had emerged from its ruins (Melikishvili 1952: 36-41; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 183). He went so far as to identify the Phrygian Kingdom with another Georgian state, in this case in Asia Minor, and related it to the Mushki (Moschi) who were traditionally identified with the Georgians by Georgian historians (Melikishvili 1952: 43-45). He localized the Kingdom of Diauekhi in the northeastern region of contemporary Turkey and maintained that, while the Hurrians dominated there in the early days, power was taken by west Georgian tribes later on. Melikishvili shared the orthodox view that the earliest Colchian state had once competed with Urartu and then had risen again during the period of Greek colonization (Melikishvili 1952: 47-49). In brief, his concepts turned the Georgians into the only heroes of the glorious events of the early 1st Millennium B.C., who had managed to survive to the present and thus had every reason to claim the heritage of the great early states of the Near East.

What about the Armenians and the North Caucasians? What was their place in the space of the ancient Near East? Quite correctly, Melikishvili put the Armenians in the Indo-European ("Hittite-Luwian") world of Asia Minor. He reproduced the Armenian view of the association of an early unity between Armenians and the state of Hayasa. Yet he did his best to isolate the early Armenian history of Urartu. He maintained that an Armenian ethnic community had formed before the Armenians arrived in the territory of Urartu, and that was why they were not affected by the Urartian culture to any major extent (Melikishvili 1952: 45-46, 1959: 171)⁴⁸). However, this approach failed to explain why the Armenian language enjoyed a substantial Urartian substratum (Diakonov 1968: 200-201, 231), and avoided discussing the relationships between the Armenians and the Georgians in the territory of the former Urartu, where the author saw their migration flows occurring quite simultaneously. In fact, Melikishvili's view of the historical relationships of Georgians suffered an inconsistency. On the one hand, he denied any non-Kartvelian substratum in Georgian, and on the other hand, recognized some Hurrian-Urartian elements in Georgian (Melikishvili 1959: 111, 116-117, 178). Anyway, while turning the Georgians into the only heirs of the Urartian culture, he deprived the Armenians of this heritage and established the basis for the historiographic conflict between Georgian and Armenian scholars. True, later on he recognized that, while spreading throughout the territory of Urartu, the Armenians assimilated the local Hurrian-Urartian population (Melikishvili 1959: 234). Thus, they too were granted the chance to claim the Urartian heritage. Later on, when Urartian participation in the Armenian ethnogenesis was well established, Georgian authors began to argue that, while affecting the Armenians to a major extent, the

Urartians had no impact on the Georgians (for example, see Khidasheli 1973). Indeed, Georgian was less affected by the Hurrian-Urartian influence than Armenian was. Yet, there is no reason to deny this impact entirely (Diakonov 1968: 241-242, note 134, 135).

Concerning the North Caucasians, Melikishvili followed Dzhavakhishvili and identified them with the “Scythian-Sarmatian” newcomers. While proving unable to break entirely with the orthodox idea of their northern homeland, he took a radical sidestep while discovering traces of the North Caucasians in Asia Minor, long before the “Scythians” had arrived there. He was the first to introduce the idea to Soviet historiography that some North Caucasian tribes were mentioned by the names “Kashka” and “Abeshla” in the inscriptions of the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077). The former were associated by Melikishvili with the “Kasogs” (Circassians) and the latter with the “Apsilae” (Abkhazians) (Melikishvili 1952: 30-32, 1959: 120, 167-170, 174. Sf. Diakonov 1968: 12-13). This discovery was greatly appreciated by the Abkhazians, and, as we shall see further on, was an important element in their own ethnogenetic schema, even though there was also an hypothesis that the Kashkas were the Kurds’ ancestors (Kapantsian 1947: 131-133). Moreover, as Melikishvili explained later, the names “Kashka” and “Abeshla” were by no means ethnic ones and were used during the time of the Hittites as collective names for the highlanders of northeastern Asia Minor (Melikishvili 1962: 319).

At any case, Melikishvili dated the first “Golden Age” of Georgian history to the second quarter of the 1st Millennium B.C., when numerous Georgian tribes migrated southward and founded successive states there. While doing that, they incorporated the Hurrians, Urartians and even the Mushki of Asia Minor. As a result, two early Georgian states were established – Colchis in the west and Iberia in the east, which were the basis for the integration of all the early Georgian tribes.

Association with early statehood and, thus, the right to their own sovereign state – this idea was a prime mover for Georgian scholars, who occupied themselves with the ethnogenesis of the Georgian people. It was at the core of Georgian ideology in general (Dragadze 1988: 10, 40). It was no accident that, as we know, both Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhanashia focused on the history of the early Georgian state as well as on Georgian origins. The same was true of Melikishvili, who did his best to trace the continuous development of the Georgian state tradition since Assyrian times. Yet it turned out that the “Moschi Kingdom”, which proved to be the state of the Indo-European Phrygians, did not fit that picture. Melikishvili focused on the less known country of Diauekhi, which was first mentioned by the Assyrians, and then in the Urartian inscriptions, as a polity located in the southwestern part of historical Georgia. There was no reliable evidence at all about the political organization or ethnic composition of the population there, but it was established that, for a long time, Diauekhi successfully resisted first Assyrian attacks and then Urartian raids. This seemed sufficient to allow Melikishvili to conclude that, if there was no well-established state there, there was still a proto-state structure, at least. His attempt to relate the local Saspis to the Iberians was

no less arbitrary. Yet, regardless of the poor basis for all these constructions, they made it reasonable to assume that the state tradition did not die out among the Georgians over millennia – it was inherited by the Kartli from the Diauekhi through the “Iberians-Saspire” (Melikishvili 1959: 102, 114, 116, 176-178, 203-209, 215-217, 234)⁴⁹). True, in another part of his seminal work, Melikishvili depicted a more plausible picture of the introduction of political organization to the early Georgians – from the Persians through the south Georgian regions that depended on Iran (Melikishvili 1959: 279).

Later on, Melikishvili elaborated his schema in the following way. He has revealed that Diauekhi was in permanent hostility with Qulhai. The latter name was close to that of Colchis, and Melikishvili shifted his interest to this promising association. He explained that the term “Colchis” had several meanings in the early days. The name itself was derived of Qulhai, a polity of the very late 2nd Millennium B.C. that dominated in the southeast Black Sea region. The classical Greeks attached a very broad meaning to this term, extending it over the vast territory between the great Caucasian Mountain ridge and Trebizond. Accordingly, they used the term “Colchians” for all the various tribal populations that, in contrast to what Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhanaashia taught, were by no means a homogeneous people. At the same time, certain classical authors linked this name with the southeast Black Sea region (between the Rioni and Çoroği Rivers) only where the Mingrelian-Chan population, i.e. the historical Laz (the Mingrelian ancestors), lived. Basing his ideas on still very scarce historical evidence, Melikishvili believed that Qulhai was an early state, at least in the 8th century B.C., when it was competing, albeit unsuccessfully, with Urartu (Melikishvili 1962. Also see Melikishvili 1959: 62-65, 259)⁵⁰).

While discussing all those numerous groups in the northeast of Asia Minor (Chalybes, Tabals, Tibareni, Macrones etc.) who were called Georgian ancestors by orthodox scholars without reserve, Melikishvili was more cautious. Indeed, groups of different origins could be covered by those collective names, more often than not. In particular, he no longer insisted that Phrygia was a Kartvelian state, and recognized that all the respective epigraphic materials were composed in the Phrygian, i.e. an Indo-European, language. Yet he did not give up hope that some Kartvelian tribes might account for part of its population. He acknowledged that the population of early Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia included the Hurrians, Hatti, Hittites, Luwians, Armenians, i.e. was fairly heterogeneous in language and culture. At the same time, he did not deny that various east and west Georgian tribes lived there as well, having been assimilated by the Armenians and Greeks, later on (Melikishvili 1959: 69-85, 167, 175, 226-227, 301-303)⁵¹). As a result, he forgot his own reservations and represented Phrygia as a powerful “Mushki Kingdom” where the Mushki were identified with the Georgians. True, he remarked that the “Georgian tribes of the Mushki that made up the population of the Phrygian Kingdom were highly Hittitized by that time” (Melikishvili 1959: 109, 111-112, 226, 229).

He realized how difficult it was to discuss the problem of the Mushki, who were claimed by the Armenians as well⁵²). That is why first he denied any relationships between the early Mushki and Indo-Europeans. Second, he opposed the western Mushki of Asia Minor with the eastern Mushki of Mesopotamia. Third, he explained the persistent interest of Georgian scholars in the Mushki (Moschi) by the fact that the Moschi had played an outstanding role in the formation of the Georgian people. Indeed, Mtskheta, the first capital of the east Georgian state, got its name from them. Melikishvili pointed to the historical area of Speri in the Upper Çoroh River Valley as the earliest center of the Meschi-Kartlian tribes, which later made up the core of the Georgian people. He believed that the Moschi had moved eastwards from there and made the east Georgians familiar with the intellectual achievements of early Asia Minor and, possibly, with its political arrangements (Melikishvili 1959: 102, 105-112, 115, 229, 233-234; 1962: 319).

In fact, the Mushki were closely related to the Phrygians and had arrived in eastern Asia Minor from the west in the 12th century B.C. The Phrygians, who were also called Mushki in Assyrian, Urartian and early Israeli sources, were just arriving in Asia Minor across the straits at that time. The Moschi of the southeast Black Sea region were the bearers of the proto-Georgian language but had nothing to do with the Mushki. It was the latter, who moved to the Upper Euphrates River area by the 9th century B.C. and commenced the Armenization of the Urartian population. The Georgian ancestors never lived in this area (Diakonov 1983: 169-171). Yet, the Georgian historian, N. V. Khazaradze, still identifies the Mushki with the Kartvelian ancestors and argues that the Armenian ancestors arrived in Eastern Anatolia no earlier than the 670s – 660s B.C. (Khazaradze 1984). This is a surprise, since she herself refers to the inscriptions of the Mushki Kings made both in Luwian earlier and in old Phrygian later (Khazaradze 1978; 1988).

Concerning the North Caucasians, Melikishvili generously settled them throughout the highlands of Georgia and Transcaucasia in general, albeit he represented them as a backward population in respect to the Georgians who occupied the lowlands. He mentioned unsuccessful attempts by the Kartli Kings to assimilate the highlanders with the help of the Christian Church (Melikishvili 1959: 119-125, 129-130).

By the mid-1960s, Melikishvili had made his view about the Colchian territory and their ethnic affiliation more precise. He believed that they lived south of the Rioni River and were concentrated around the Çoroh River Valley until very late in the 1st Millennium B.C. He identified these Colchians with the “Georgian-Zan”, i.e. Mingrelian-Chan, tribes. He settled the Svans to the north of them up to Dioscurias (the contemporary Sukhum) and argued that they were encompassed by the Hellenistic name, the “Heniokhoi”. In his view, the Misimianoi who lived next to them must be identified as Svans as well. To prove that, he referred to local place names and put forward quite convincing linguistic arguments (Melikishvili 1966).

While discussing drastic changes of the ethnic names in northern Colchis at the dawn of the Christian era, Melikishvili linked this with mass tribal migrations. In

particular, he believed that the Abkhazian ancestors, Apsilae and Abasgoi, had crossed the great Caucasian mountain ridge by the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. Together with their relatives, they forced the earlier Georgian tribes out of the maritime region. A decline in political organization and barbarianization was the result (Melikishvili 1959: 88-90, 98-99, 307-308, 310, 364-365; 1973: 141-142). Albeit not as radical as Ingoroqva's theory, this approach still represented the Georgians as the first settlers in the territory of Abkhazia and introduced the idea of the "dual aboriginality" that received special political importance in the very late 1980s. The Abkhazians were also depicted as a less advanced population with respect to the Georgians. Naturally, none of this satisfied the Abkhazians.

Moreover, Melikishvili ascribed the initiative for the unification of Georgia to the Kartli state, as though the latter had greatly affected western Georgia as early as the 3rd – 2nd centuries B.C. It is worth analyzing his arguments for that reason. For example, he was alert to the fact that the Byzantines of the 3rd – 4th centuries A.D. had never mentioned any dominance of Kartli over Egrisi. Yet, he explained that by their tendentious stance and unwillingness to recognize reality. He intentionally skipped a detailed analysis of the unification of Georgia by the Abkhazian Kingdom. Ultimately, in his representation, this turned out to be a victory for the Kartli Kingdom, which involved western Georgia in its interaction sphere for centuries. This was a cultural triumph for the Georgian language and writing system over those of the Greeks, rather than a political victory by one of the local rulers. Melikishvili taught that the unification of Georgia had led to the Georgianization of the Abkhazian nobility and the formation of a uniform Georgian people. Yet, he included only Kartes, Mingrelians and Svans among these people; the Abkhazians were missing from the list (Melikishvili 1959: 131-135). Naturally, he avoided discussing the big language and cultural differences between the Kartes, Mingrelians and Svans. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that the Georgian language was alien to the Mingrelians and Svans except for their elite, until the 19th and, even, the very beginning of the 20th century (Hewitt 1995a).

Later on, obviously affected by Abkhazian political actions, Melikishvili represented the political developments in the 8th – 10th centuries more favorably to the Abkhazians. He criticized orthodox Georgian historiography for playing down the role of the Abkhazian Kingdom in the unification of Georgia and instead exaggerating the role of the south Georgian Principality of Tao-Klargeti (for example, see Dzhanashia 1991: 48; Berdzenishvili, Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia 1950: 162-165, 169; Melikishvili 1959: 138-139; Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 129-137). Melikishvili pointed out that, first, the name "King of the Abkhazians" always preceded "King of the Kartvelians" in the Georgian Kings' title. Second, the former Abkhazian capital of Kutatisi served as the capital of the united Georgian state for the whole century. The meaning of this went far beyond symbolic association with a former powerful Abkhazian Kingdom; the Kings of the united Georgia were willing to mobilize the Abkhazian power in order to suppress revolts and to keep conquering new territories. Melikishvili demonstrated convincingly that the

exaggeration of Tao-Klargeti's role and of the importance of its ruler, named David, was rooted in the old Georgian chronicles, whose authors were Kartli patriots and viewed western Georgia as a remote outlying land of no importance to the Georgian historical process. In fact, the process of Georgian unification up to its very end was entirely controlled by the Abkhazian Kingdom, which was no less powerful than Tao-Klargeti. In contrast with orthodox Georgian historiography, Melikishvili taught that the process developed against the plans of the Tao-Klargeti ruler rather than in favor of him. Indeed, Kartli was taken not by him but by the Abkhazian Dynasty, and the Tao-Klargeti Principality joined Byzantium through its ruler's will and was lost by Georgia forever (Melikishvili 1973: 133-138). All of this occurred long before the establishment of the Turkish state. Thus, the nationalist idea of the 19th – 20th centuries did not fit the intrigues of the medieval rulers! It did not correspond to the matrimonial policy of the Georgian Kings either. Indeed, it is no secret that the grandmother, mother and second husband of Queen Tamar were of Ossetian origin. David the Builder kept order in his state and waged wars of conquest with the help of the Turkic-speaking Qypchaqs (Voronov 1995).

Melikishvili's views in question were an outcome of his participation in a project carried out by the major Georgian historians in the 1950s and aimed at the composition of a new textbook on the history of Georgia. The textbook of the 1940s was considered less appropriate, as it had been closely linked with the Stalin-Beria political regime, and in 1954 the CC CPG ordered the Georgian historians to complete a new one. The latter came out in Georgian in 1958, and an extended version was published in Russian in 1962. The chapters that dealt with the earliest periods of Georgian history, up to the 3rd century B.C., were written by Melikishvili. The chapters on the late classical and early medieval times were completed by Professor V. D. Dondua. The hottest issue of the political unification of Georgia was analysed by the leading Georgian historian of that time, N. A. Berdzenishvili. It is of interest that the formation and political activity of the Abkhazian Kingdom were covered by earlier writings by Dzhanashia, inserted in the book. By the period in question, his view of the role of the Abkhazian Kingdom in Georgian history had become dogma, and nobody dared to interpret this issue in any other way. Finally, the most glorious time in the history of Georgia, between the unification and the Mongolian conquest, was depicted by Berdzenishvili as well (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962).

What, in particular, seemed most attractive to these authors on Georgian history? What did they attempt to tell the reader? Quite correctly, they distinguished between three distinct groups (Mingrelian-Chan, Kart and Svan) within the Kartvelian family of languages. Yet, they located their early speakers in the same territories where their descendants live nowadays – the Mingrelian-Chans in the southeast and eastern Black Sea regions, the Karts east of them, and the Svans in the highlands and, to some extent in the lowlands of western Georgia (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 27-28). Thus, they told the reader that Georgians occupied all the contemporary territory of Georgia from time immemorial. True, the

North Caucasians were mentioned as living there as well, but they were represented as close Georgian relatives, in accordance with the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis.

Diauekhi and Qulhai were called the earliest Georgian polities (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 28-32). Thus, the Georgian state tradition was presented as having lasted 3,000 years, and the Georgians as the bearers of one of the earliest state traditions in the world⁵³). True, these polities were in decline by the 8th – 7th centuries B.C. However, in order to prove the continuity of the state tradition, Melikishvili constructed a powerful tribal alliance of “Saspire” in the Upper Çoroh River Valley and depicted it as Diauekhi’s heir. Simultaneously, he included in this alliance what remained of the Urartian tribes defeated by the Medes. This is how the “Saspire” came to be seen as enjoying the Urartian cultural heritage (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 33-34). Melikishvili localized the Colchian Kingdom (6th – 3rd centuries B.C.) in the Colchis lowlands and called it the successor of early Qulhai. While glorifying the power of this state, he intentionally played down the role of the classical Greek colonies, reducing it only to trade and craft activities (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 36-41).

Melikishvili related the emergence of a state in eastern Georgia in the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. on the one hand with the strong influence of the Achaemenian state (which is correct. V. Sh.), and on the other hand, with the arrival of the Moschi from Asia Minor. It was from there that they brought the valuable Hittite political and cultural knowledge (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 43-45). The process of continuous integration was depicted as if it were inherent in the Georgian tribes. It was traced from the Bronze Age and especially to the time after the Kartli Kingdom was established. Melikishvili recognized the heterogeneous nature of the Kingdom’s population. Beside Georgians, it included the North Caucasians, Scythians, Hittites, Hurrians and Urartians, all of whom were successfully assimilated by the Georgians and shifted to speaking Georgian (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 50-51). While discussing the early Kartli state, the textbook referred extensively to rich archaeological materials from the Mtskheta region, where the Kings’ residence, the rulers’ mausoleums, magnificent noble tombs and the earliest traces of a writing system (so-called “Armazeen writing” that formed at the basis of the Aramaic alphabet in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D.) were discovered in the late 1930s – 1940s. These proved the early development of the Georgian state (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 70-78. Also see Melikishvili 1959: 22)⁵⁴).

The adoption of Christianity in the 4th century A.D. was of crucial importance to the development of early Georgian culture. At that time, the original Georgian alphabet was introduced, theological manuscripts began to be translated into Georgian, and the Georgian literary tradition was born. It was emphasized in the textbook that the Georgian writing system was by no means invented by St. Mesrob Mashtots; instead, it was created on the basis of “Armazeen writing” (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 88-89. Cf. Berdzenishvili et al. 1950: 95)⁵⁵). In order to prove that, the authors referred to an hypothesis by G. V. Tsereteli, put forward at the very end of the 1940s during the wave of the state patriotism, which demanded

a search for the pre-Christian roots of the writing system (Tsereteli 1949)⁵⁶). In the meantime, later on it was demonstrated that, although Mesrob Mashtots could not be considered the founder of the Georgian alphabet, the latter could not have emerged without his influence (Perikhanian 1966: 127-133).

The situation in Western Georgia was more complicated, and archaeologists failed to discover firm evidence of the emergence of a local state there. Instead, the numerous historical documents permitted various interpretations. Nonetheless, the textbook emphasized that the rulers of medieval Lazica considered themselves the successors of the earlier Colchis Kings. Thus, one could suggest that an unbroken state tradition had existed there as well (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 79-80), despite the fact that the “Colchis Kingdom” had disintegrated by the 2nd century B.C., and a fairly different political pattern had emerged over the following centuries, having nothing to do with this Kingdom (Inadze 1953; Melikishvili 1959: 364-375). The Apsilae and the Abasgoi were mentioned among other local tribes of the late classical – early medieval periods, but the textbook avoided discussing their relationships with the contemporary Abkhazians. Instead, the authors pointed to the cultural rapprochement between Kartli and Egrisi in the 4th – 5th centuries, as though the Georgian writing system had forced out the Greek one in the west at that time (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 114)⁵⁷).

The Abkhazian Kingdom was called the “true Georgian Kingdom”, the firm position of Georgian there was emphasized, and the Kingdom’s name was explained by the “tribal affiliation of the ruling dynasty”. Yet, Abkhazian language and culture were ignored in this discussion. Naturally, the foreign policy of the Abkhazian Kingdom was characterized as “Georgian”. The political activities of the Tao-Klargeti principality were especially appreciated as being the last decisive step in the unification of Georgia (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 128-137). The textbook proudly exalted the outstanding deeds of David the Builder (the end of the 11th – beginning of the 12th centuries) who extended the Georgian borders and turned it into a multi-ethnic state. Yet, even here the authors failed to mention the Abkhazians. Instead, Georgia was represented as the savior of the Transcaucasian peoples from foreign subjugation and as the center of the Caucasian cultural world (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 169-170, 189). Moreover, Georgia of Queen Tamar’s time was claimed to be the most powerful state in the Near East. Indeed, it managed to establish the vassal Trebizond state in the south Black Sea region at that time, in order to resist the Seljuq expansion (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 203-206). The nickname of Queen Tamar’s son, “Lasha”, was mentioned, albeit without explanation.

Instead, at this time, the textbook touched upon the appearance of the South Ossetians in Georgia; they were represented as bloodthirsty barbarians who arranged continuous raids against peaceful Georgian villages, and massacred or forced out their residents. Despite the resistance of Georgian troops, they managed to secure the highland gorges and, from the 13th century, lived within the Imereti Kingdom (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 248-254, 283). The textbook got into the

Abkhazian issue only with respect to the events of the 17th century and maintained that Georgian dominated in their public life (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 312-313). It goes without saying that the Abkhazians treated this textbook as a relapse to Ingoroqva's concepts (Marykhuba 1994a: 125-126).

Thus, the following conception of the formation and early history of the Georgian people had developed in Georgian historiography by the 1960s. Now, the core of its formation was located in Transcaucasia, and only partly in the northern and probably central regions of Asia Minor. The latter was only considered important because the Mushki (Meschi) had come from there and brought Hittite achievements with them, as though the latter made the Georgians heirs of the earliest civilizations. Then, too, it was not easy for the Georgian authors to give up the idea that the inhabitants of Asia Minor who invented iron metallurgy were of Georgian origin. However, the archaeologists who had discovered the rich heritage of the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age cultures strongly supported the autochthonist approach that was therefore appreciated by other academic fields. The main center of the Georgian state and culture was linked with Eastern Georgia, where early Christianity was rapidly Georgianized and made the basis of the future rich Georgian literary tradition. True, the Colchis Kingdom was also glorified as one of the early centers of the Georgian state tradition. Yet, in general western Georgia was granted only a subsidiary role, since it was in the ecclesiastical sphere of the Constantinople patriarchs in early medieval times, and the Georgian literary tradition commenced there only in the 10th century. This view emphasized three points: autochthonism, early baptism, and the kingdom of David the Builder and the Queen Tamar. It was taught in Georgian schools and served an important basis of the Georgian identity in the 1960s – 1980s. Archaeological finds played a significant role in confirming it, and even Georgian peasants kept them in their houses as proof that their ancestors lived in the Georgian territory from time immemorial (Dragadze 1988: 9-10, 40).

Interesting to note, the united Georgian Kingdom and the Orthodox Christian faith were among the most impressive symbols that were mobilized by Georgian nationalists, as they struggled for independence in 1989 – 1990. From the end of 1989, Georgia used every reason to emphasize its relationships with Christianity. The arrival of a copy of the Virgin Mary of Iberia icon from Greece to Tbilisi on October 9, 1989 turned into one of the first new public rituals and provoked widespread exaltation. After that time, the major Georgian newspapers used to publish photographs of Georgian medieval churches, which awoke historical memory among the Georgians, on the one hand, and strengthened their Christian identity, on the other hand. Side by side, secular rituals were cultivated that were closely linked with the idea of independence. On February 8, 1991, Georgia celebrated the anniversary of David the Builder's ascension to the throne, which proved to be a good reason for the Georgian mass media to disseminate material on the territorial unity and independence of Georgia. Next in turn was the famous Georgian poet, Shota Rustaveli, whose jubilee was celebrated on May 28, 1991.

The “Abkhazian Kingdom” was given its due for its role in the unification of Georgia, but its name was always put in quotation marks, and only Georgian heroes were acting on the historical stage. Certain Georgian authors managed to skip the Abkhazian Kingdom altogether, while discussing the issue of the unification of Georgia. Of all the architectural monuments in the territory of Abkhazia, the Georgian authors were most fascinated by the Besleti Bridge at Sukhumi, where a Georgian inscription from the 12th century had been discovered. Various Georgian authors focused their efforts on deriving Abkhazian place names from Georgian words. The Abkhazians had no place in this history, and even early Christian churches in Abkhazian territory were ascribed to the “Abkhazian school of Georgian architecture”. This view of Georgian history was disseminated among the public by popular books on the history of Georgian architecture (Garakanidze 1959; Amiranashvili 1963; Beridze 1967, 1974; Dzhanberidze, Tsitsishvili 1976), culture (Menabde 1968), seafaring (Beradze 1989), and military skill (Dzhordzhadze 1989). Some of the Georgian specialists in folk architectural traditions listed Abkhazians among the “west Georgian tribes” and went so far as to ascribe all the antiquities of Abkhazia from the Bronze Age dolmen culture to the early medieval Abasgoi and Apsilian groups to Georgian ancestors (Garakanidze 1959; Adamia 1968)⁵⁸. An image of the glorious history of early Georgia was thus imposed upon the public mind. This image was especially actively disseminated by the Georgian media in 1988-1989 (for example, see Tukhashvili 1989), when Georgians struggled mightily to attain independence.

CHAPTER 5

THE COLCHIAN MIRAGE

The idea of an early Colchis Kingdom, the earliest one in the east Black Sea region, excited Georgian scholars for a long time. They were even more stimulated by systematic archaeological studies there carried out from the 1950s (Inadze 1968: 6-38; Lordkipanidze 1979a). As we already know, this idea was shared by the Academician Dzhavakhishvili, and even more so by Melikishvili, who was attempting to mobilize new materials to illuminate the issue. Yet, the latter's views were somewhat inconsistent, since the thoughtful scholar in him was struggling with his Georgian patriot side. While touching upon the issues in question, Melikishvili introduced an important elaboration. He taught that one has to distinguish between, on the one hand, the pre-state formation of Qolhai/Qulhai that competed with Urartu and was memorialized by the romantic Argonaut myth, and on the other hand, the Colchis Kingdom, contemporary of the Greek colonies in the Black Sea region. The scholar acknowledged that there were no hard arguments in favor of the state status of the "Kingdom of Qulhai", but nonetheless, he granted it an important role in the Georgian political process and even provided it with a capital at the mouth of the Çoroh River (Melikishvili 1959: 185-186, 214-219)⁵⁹).

Melikishvili was even more fascinated with the early Colchis Kingdom and assumed that its capital, the legendary Aea, was situated on the Phasis (Rioni) River (Melikishvili 1959: 245; Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 58). He went even further and maintained that the Colchis Kingdom was called "Egrisi" by its neighbors (Melikishvili 1959: 236)⁶⁰). In fact, there was no evidence of that at all, and he just transferred the early medieval pattern to an earlier period. Melikishvili also pointed to the silver coins, called "colchidki", a number of which were found in the east Black Sea region. He supposed that they were minted by the local inhabitants, and this had to be a firm argument in favor of the development of a class society there, and thus, a slave state, according to the Marxist view (Melikishvili 1959: 247-248; Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 39-41).

Georgian authors attached great importance to Herodotus' (IV, 37) account of "four peoples" living in the Near East during his time: the Persians, Medes, Saspies and Colchians. They assume that, if the Persians and Medes enjoyed large states, then the other two peoples must, as well (Dzhanashia, Berdzenishvili 1945; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 52, 1991: 110-111). The advocates of this approach do not hesitate to entertain that conclusion, despite the fact that intensive archaeological

excavations in the east Black Sea region over decades still yields nothing there resembling large cities built by local inhabitants, ruler's residences, or temples which might be dated to the mid-1st Millennium B.C.

The only site where Georgian archaeologists were expecting to find the anticipated evidence of a flourishing Colchis Kingdom was a mound situated near the contemporary settlement of Vani in the Sulori Gorge in Imereti. Yet, the optimistic hopes of O. D. Lordkipanidze, director of many years' standing of the excavations in Vani, that he would find traces of early Colchis palaces and temples in the layers of the 6th – 5th centuries B.C. (Lordkipanidze 1976: 13) have never come to fruition. A large fortified settlement with magnificent stone temples was excavated in Vani, but it was dated to the Hellenistic period, when the local culture was greatly affected by the Greeks. Only scant and obscure remains of a wooden building that the archaeologists interpreted as a sanctuary dated to the period of the "flourishing Colchis Kingdom". At the same time, neither fortified buildings, nor palaces, nor even traces of dwellings were found there. Instead, rich burials and numerous gold and silver artifacts were discovered at Vani and some other contemporary sites (Itkhvisi and some other) that demonstrated a high level of social differentiation (Lordkipanidze 1978: 39 ff., 62, 69; 1979a: 60-66, 180-184; 1985; 1991: 112, 116, 118, 122-125; 1992). Yet, these burials alone cannot serve as a firm evidence in support of a state organization. That is why the optimistic view of Lordkipanidze, that the "administrative center of one of the Colchian *skeptoukiai*" (Lordkipanidze 1978: 69, 1991: 124-125) was located in Vani, should be considered premature. There are more reasons to agree with A. I. Boltunova that the flourishing of Vani was the result of close contacts with the classical Greek world rather than of an illusive highly centralized Colchis Kingdom (Boltunova 1963: 156-157).

All of this was disappointing; hence, Melikishvili's waver. On the one hand, he considered the Colchis Kingdom to be unstable formation, the development of which was hampered by strong Greek cultural influence as well as permanent raids by the highlanders (Melikishvili 1959: 115-116, 126). On the other hand, he emphasized in the same book that, quite to the contrary, the powerful Colchis Kingdom left no good grounds for Greek political activity, and, thus, Greek colonization was of a different nature there to that in the northern Black Sea region, and was limited to only traders' and craftsmen's activities. He pointed out that the population in local Greek cities was of mixed origins, and the share of indigenous inhabitants grew over time (Melikishvili 1959: 242, 244).

It is the latter concept, endowed with a heavy touch of patriotism that was appreciated by the Georgian specialists who developed it over the last few decades. One of them was Teimuraz K. Mikeladze (1925-1998) who, from the 1950s, occupied himself with studying the history of the Georgian tribes of northern Asia Minor and the southeast Black Sea region. Mikeladze was born to an elite Tbilisi family. In 1949, he graduated from the Historical Faculty of Tbilisi University and then was a post-graduate student in the Department of Archaeology and History of

the Ancient World. After graduation, he worked first at the Telavi State Pedagogical Institute, and then came back to Tbilisi in 1956 when he was hired by the prestigious Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 1961-1966, he was the director of the archaeological excavations in the city of Poti and its vicinity, and, starting in 1971, was the permanent director of the Colchis archaeological project. He was one of the initiators of the founding, in 1977, of the Center for Archaeological Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR in the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography. The Center, directed by one of the leading Georgian archaeologists, Otar D. Lordkipanidze, turned out to be the main agency for the coordination of all the archaeological studies in the territory of Georgia (Lordkipanidze 1982: 8). Mikeladze was a deputy director of the Center from the very beginning. Later on, he was appointed a member of the Archaeological Committee of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. He was highly respected in Georgia, and after he died, a Cabinet of Colchis Archaeology was established in his name in the Center for archaeological studies. Being a well known Georgian researcher, Mikeladze was heavily involved in teaching: he ran a permanent seminar called "Archaeological Talks" at the Center for Archaeological Studies and gave regular courses in Tbilisi University on the ethnogenesis of the Georgian tribes according to archaeological data (Lordkipanidze, Dzhorbenadze 2000). Thus, Georgian University students have been absorbing his ideas over the last few decades.

In his Candidate in History thesis, Mikeladze focused on the location of the early Georgian tribes (the same Chalibes, Tibareni, Macrones, Mossynoeci, Taochi etc.) who were mentioned by Xenophon (Mikeladze 1953), and his Doctor of History thesis dealt with early Colchis and its population (Mikeladze 1969, 1974). In fact, his Candidate in History thesis failed to make any substantial contribution to the orthodox Georgian historical approach (for example, see Dzhnanashia 1959a) but it contained a speculative idea about an allusion to the Georgian tribes in the Biblical story of Cain and Abel (Mikeladze 1953: 16. Also see Mikeladze 1969: 55-57). Later on, he argued that the Georgian ancestors, namely the Chaldeans and Tubals, graced humanity with the invention of iron metallurgy and enjoyed their kingdoms of Tabal and Halitu in Asia Minor (Mikeladze 1969: 46-64, 1974: 188-189). Following him, this idea was developed further by the archaeologist, D. A. Khakhutaishvili, who discovered a substantial center of early iron production in western Georgia. He had no doubt that the local craftsmen were of Chalybes origin, whom he identified with the Hatti, following the leading Soviet historical linguist, Viach. Vs. Ivanov. Yet Ivanov had established close relationships between the Hatti and the Abkhazian-Adyghe languages (Ivanov 1985). However, Khakhutaishvili assumed that the Chalybes were affiliated with the Colchis group of Kartvelian tribes (Khakhutaishvili 1988a, 1988b).

Mikeladze picked up Melikishvili's idea of the Mushki's (Moschi) identity with the Meschi, isolated them from the Thracians, considered them to be the

earliest Georgians, and believed that they moved to the east Black Sea region in the late 1st Millennium B.C. (Mikeladze 1969: 65-66, 1974). In accordance with the orthodox Georgian historical view, he derived the ancestors of the rest of the Georgians (Svans, Mingrelians) also from Asia Minor (Mikeladze 1974: 184). The aspiration to put the Moschi in classical Colchis has a long tradition in Georgian historiography. In the meantime, it was recently demonstrated that this approach has no good grounds: in fact, the Moschi still lived in the central regions of Asia Minor in the mid-1st Millennium B.C. and moved eastwards towards the southwest Georgia borderlands only by the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. (Khazaradze 1984, 1991).

In his Doctor of History thesis, Mikeladze based his views on the questionable idea, popular however among Soviet archaeologists, of the identity between an archaeological culture, on the one hand, and an ethnic and language entity, on the other hand (Mikeladze 1969: 3-6, 1974: 183. Also see Dzhaparidze 1980: 7). On this basis, he concluded there was already an ethnically homogeneous population in the Rioni and the Çoroh River Basins as far as the Upper Kura River in the late 2nd Millennium B.C. He identified this population with the Colchians, who were Kartified in the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. (Mikeladze 1969: 26-27. Also see O. Lordkipanidze 1989: 185, 188-201, 1991: 93, 1992: 201-202). He argued that ethnic unity was reflected in the homogeneous Colchis archaeological culture. Moreover, he interpreted the Koban' culture of the central Caucasus as a derivative of the Colchis culture and identified it with some Georgian group (Mikeladze 1990: 75-76. See also O. Lordkipanidze 1991: 95). As was already noticed, this approach was shared by Dzhanashia. Melikishvili was of the same opinion (Melikishvili 1962: 321). At the same time, contemporary archaeologists point to important differences between the Koban' and the Colchis cultures and avoid their direct identification (for example, see Kozenkova 1996: 130-131).

Moreover, by the time Mikeladze was completing his Doctor of History thesis, it had already been established that the Colchis culture was by no means a homogeneous one, consisting instead of several local groups (Koridze 1965). What was the meaning of those groups: were they parts of one and the same ethnic community or did they reflect interactions between several distinct ethnic groups? Alternatively, did they perhaps reflect distinct social rather than ethnic divisions? Neither Mikeladze, nor his Georgian colleagues put these questions.

At the same time, the existence of a powerful tribal alliance made it possible to assume that a local state could be formed in the Colchis lowlands on its basis. Mikeladze dated its emergence from the late 2nd Millennium B.C., and began a new period of flourishing of the Colchis Kingdom from the 8th – 7th centuries B.C., although he acknowledged that there was no reliable evidence for that (Mikeladze 1969: 81-86, 1974: 190-191. Also see Khakhutaishvili 1955)⁶¹).

Other Georgian authors were not that radical; yet, they also believed that a local state flourished in the Colchis territory in the 6th – 3rd centuries B.C. They differed from each other only with respect to its chronological and territorial

framework. The issue of the location of its political center was still in great dispute (for example, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 53-54). According to the most moderate approach, the political flourishing of the Colchis Kingdom was very brief, being restricted only to the 6th – 5th century B.C., after which it shrank to a small polity in the Rioni River Basin. In contrast to Melikishvili, the author of this hypothesis, M. P. Inadze, explained the weakness of that state with reference to internal causes – the vitality of the tribal structures and customs within its territory (Inadze 1968: 164, 1973: 168-169). She was on the mark, although she also exaggerated the greatness of the Colchis Kingdom. In fact, on the strength of the classical authors, one is able to talk of only a small polity in the Phasis River region (Braund 1994: 91). On these grounds, some scholars put into doubt any state organization at all among the Colchians before the last centuries of the 1st Millennium B.C. (Boltunova 1952: 178). Those who recognize its existence, depicted it as being based on a very loose political structure that lacked any strong king's authority (Discussion 1992; Tsetskheladze 1997: 113-114).

Regardless of differences among the Georgian researchers themselves, all of them shared Melikishvili's idea that the Colchian Kingdom hampered Greek colonization and restricted the autonomy of Greek settlements. In the view of the Georgian scholars, the Greeks had to arrange their colonies in already well established local towns and extensively used the services of local craftsmen. Furthermore, the density of the local rural population prevented the Greeks from developing their own farming economy, in contrast to their practice in other regions of colonization. The Georgian authors argued that there were no typical Greek city-states in the Colchis lowland (Inadze 1958, 1968: 143-144, 157-158, 1979; Lomouri 1960, 1962: 61-62; Lordkipanidze 1966: 63-64, 1979b, 1989: 256-272; Mikeladze 1969: 38-39, 1974: 187; Kaukhchishvili 1975: 496-497; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 230)⁶². With the aspiration of playing down the Greek role in the Black Sea region, a certain Georgian author went so far as to argue that the core of the Argonaut myth was based on the seafaring trips of Georgian sailors to Achaean Greece, rather than vice-versa. He wrote of extensive trade between Colchis and the northern and western Black Sea regions, while failing to mention that the Greeks rather than the Georgians were most engaged in this activity (Beradze 1989: 32, 66 ff.).

Written sources about the Colchis Kingdom were very scarce but the volume of archaeological data was growing every year. During the last half a century, archaeological materials have most attracted Georgian researchers (Lordkipanidze 1976: 12-13, 1979a: 11-29). What evidence did Georgian authors draw out of the archaeological materials in order to prove the highly restricted nature of Greek colonization in the east Black Sea region? Indeed, specialists acknowledged that it was hard to study this problem. The cities that were well known to the classical authors were still less explored; there were no data at all on the organization of city life; it was difficult to prove the idea of the mixed composition of the inhabitants of urban sites (Lordkipanidze 1979a: 119, 1979b: 191-195, 202; Kohl, Tsetskheladze

1995: 165; Tsetskhladze 1997: 101-110, 113-114).

Thus, one had to rely on indirect data. Georgian historians and archaeologists first emphasized that the Colchis seashore and, especially, the sites of future Greek cities had dense local populations long before the Greeks arrived. In particular, it was demonstrated that the local culture was replaced by the Greek one in some areas; in other areas they coexisted peacefully; cases were also known when Greek and local people were buried in the same graveyards (Lordkipanidze 1979a: 120-143, 1979b: 203-232; Inadze 1968: 97-106, 128-140, 1979: 284-287). It was also remarked that they worshipped some local Goddess, side by side with Apollo in Phasis (Lomouri 1960). The Georgian authors concluded that the arrival of the Greeks did not cause any radical changes in political, economic or cultural patterns. One could not observe any significant Hellenization of the local inhabitants; instead, the Greeks were affected by the local culture. All of this was explained with reference to some powerful centralized Colchis state (Lomouri 1960; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 144-148, 1979b: 233-237, 1992: 198)⁶³. They maintained that the name "Dioscurias" was Georgian rather than Greek, and, thus, the site was built up by the local inhabitants, and only Colchians lived there initially (Inadze 1968: 121; Mikeladze 1969: 43-44, 92, 1974: 187-188; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 133-134, 1979b: 221-222)⁶⁴.

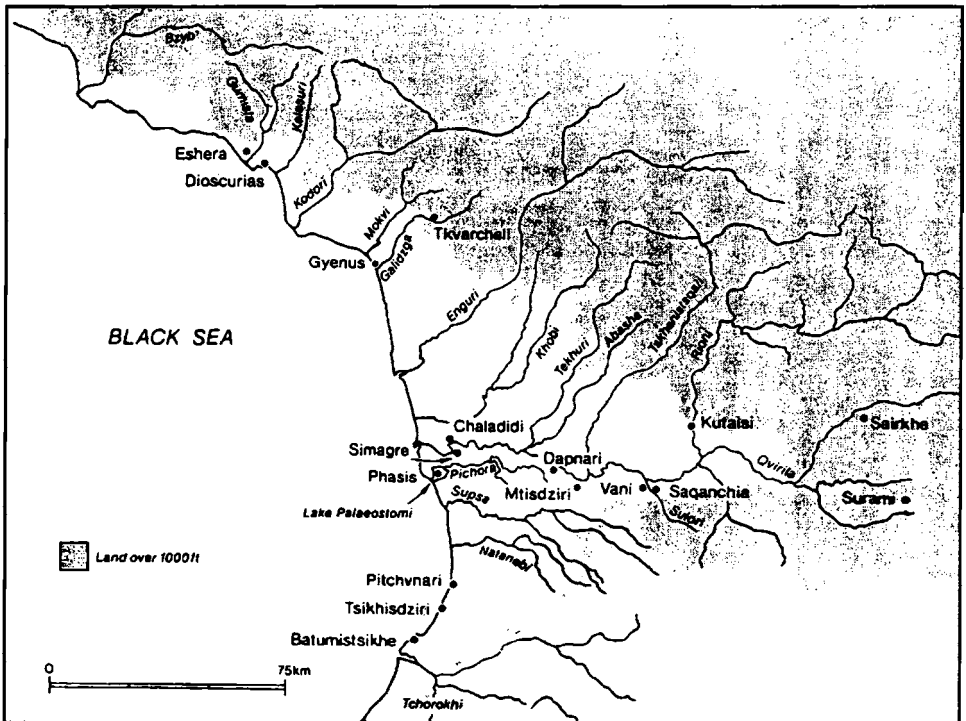
The idea about the origins of "colchidki" was highly disputable. Georgian scholars recognized that the prototype of these silver coins, which predominated in Colchis in classical times, was brought from the city of Miletus, which had a lion a symbol and worshipped Apollo (Dondua 1987: 17-20; Tsetskhladze 1997: 103-104). Yet, they argued that the coins might have been minted in some local political center, situated in the Rioni River Basin (Mikeladze 1974: 191) or somewhere else, and their symbolism might be rooted in local beliefs rather than in the Greek world alone (Kapanadze, Golenko 1957; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 176, 1979b: 250-255)⁶⁵.

At the same time, while playing down the role of Greek colonization and referring to the lack and obscure nature of archaeological evidence for it, Georgian authors failed to mention that there was even less reliable evidence of a Colchis Kingdom. There were no good reports of the latter in the classical literature (Boltunova 1952: 178, 1979a: 260; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 165). Those data that were available provided no firm grounds for any hypothesis of a well-established sovereign kingdom, and even suggested that the Colchian tribes were dependent on the Achaemenian Empire of the 6th – 5th centuries B.C. (Boltunova 1979b: 51; Yailenko 1982).

The available historical evidence of the Greek colonization, on the other hand, was by no means worthless⁶⁶. Indeed, the lion image on the "colchidki" was no accident; this was related to the Apollo cult, characteristic of Miletus, the mother polity where the early Greek colonists came from (Inadze 1968: 168, 1979: 288; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 174-175; Dondua 1987: 17-20; Tsetskhladze 1997: 104). Moreover, a silver bowl originating from Phasis was discovered in the Kuban' region in 1899. It served as firm evidence that Phasis had a temple to Apollo, as one

could expect of a city of the Miletian Greeks (Boltunova 1963: 156; Inadze 1968: 177; Kaukhchishvili 1975: 495-496; Lordkipanidze 1979a: 12, 124-125, 1979b: 209; Braund 1994: 97; Tsetskhladze 1997: 103). There are good reasons to assume that the “colchidki” began to be minted in Colchis under the influence of the Miletian Greeks. Certain authors supposed that they were minted in Phasis, a Greek city-state in the Rioni River mouth, as was stated by classical authors. This does not contradict the idea that in Phasis they worshipped some local Goddess as well as the traditional Greek gods (Boltunova 1963: 156-157; Braund 1994: 118-121; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 166). True, Pliny the Elder called Dioscurias a “city of the Colchians”, but this was at a time when it had lost its Greek nature. A somewhat different situation in southern Colchis proved to be less representative. Indeed, not many Greek colonists settled there, because of the high density of the local population (map 17). Still, Greek settlements were built up even in that area (Inadze 1968: 122; Braund 1994: 95; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 166; Tsetskhladze 1997: 109-110).

Yet, the bulk of the Greek settlers moved northward, where they found a more appropriate area for settlement at the Rioni River mouth. Here and further north, more backward tribes lived than those in the south. The Greeks settled either in unpopulated areas or in those that had been abandoned long before. The Greek settlements with their developed infrastructure were attractive to the indigenous



Map 17 Colchis in the Greek period (after Braund 1994)

inhabitants. That is why local settlements were very soon built in their vicinity. It was no accident that rapid economic and cultural growth in Cochis coincided with Greek colonization. Greek was spreading gradually through the region, and the Greek alphabet and customs were appreciated (Boltunova 1963: 155-157, 167, 1979a; Yailenko 1982; Inadze 1968: 180-183; G. Lordkipanidze 1978; Voronov 1979; Shamba 1979; Tsetsckhladze 1993: 16-21; Lakoba 1993: 40-54; Kohl, Tsetsckhladze 1995: 167-168; Tsetsckhladze 1998). Even one of the most ardent advocates of the Georgian approach, O. D. Lordkipanidze, had to agree with that (Lordkipanidze 1979a: 154-179, 190-196, 199-200, 207-210, 1979b: 256, 1992: 200 ff.). Moreover, a new hypothesis has been put forward recently that assumes that Greek colonization was restricted in the east Black Sea region by the factor of a natural environment that was less appropriate for traditional Greek farming, rather than by the illusory might of a Colchis Kingdom (Tsetsckhladze 1993: 13, 1997: 112-114).

As argued by Yu. N. Voronov, the hypothesis of a mighty Colchis Kingdom was highly stimulated during the Lavrenty Beria era. Meanwhile, according to the most reliable evidence from classical authors, the Colchians lived neither in the Phasis (contemporary Rioni) River Valley, nor north of it. Other tribes occupied those areas, which were called the Heniokhoi by the Greeks, but, unfortunately, there is no evidence at all of their language. As concerns the Colchis Kingdom itself, there are scholars who cast doubt upon its very existence. At the same time, downplaying the role of Greek colonization leads to a distorted view of both the cultural development and political evolution in the east Black Sea region. Yet, it was the Greek influence, as was demonstrated by Voronov, that played a major role in the formation of the early local political organization, the introduction of a writing system and the adoption of Christianity. In the meantime, the tendency to play down the Greek factor, dominating Georgian scholarship, caused intentional restriction of the related archaeological studies. As a professional archaeologist, Voronov was well aware what he was writing (Voronov 1989a, 1989b). At the same time, the idea of the political connotations of scholarly constructions was alien to Georgian historiography. In a pamphlet with the promising title, "Archaeology and Contemporaneity", O. D. Lordkipanidze wrote a lot about the history of archaeological studies as well as the cognitive role of archaeology, but failed to mention its ideological and socio-political functions (Lordkipanidze 1979c).

Actually, Georgian scholarship was unable to give up the idea of a mighty Colchis Kingdom. Indeed, that idea would permit them to construct the picture of continuous development of the Georgian political tradition in the east Black Sea region over a very long period, which, in Mikeladze's view, embraced 2,500 years. While ignoring serious breaks in this continuity, which were acknowledged by other Georgian authors (for example, see Melikishvili 1959), Mikeladze developed an illusory schema about Colchis state development that reproduced the chronology of the history of Ancient Egypt. He identified an Old state in the 12th – 6th centuries B.C., a Middle state in the 6th – 1st centuries B.C., and a New state in the

1st – 6th centuries A.D. (Mikeladze 1974). Another Georgian scholar introduced a new term for the period from the 7th century B.C. – 4th century A.D., as well. He called it the “Iberian-Colchis period”, which implied the notion of minor Greco-Roman impact on Colchis (for that, see Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 163). The idea of a Colchis Kingdom enjoys a prestigious place in the fundamental academic publications of Georgian history (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 195, 205-208). It is unreservedly put forth by Georgian scholars as veritable truth (for example, see Lordkipanidze 1990: 6, 40). The formation of the “national material and intellectual culture of Georgia” in the pre-Christian period is closely linked with the Colchis Kingdom (Lordkipanidze 1984). The Colchis Kingdom is a favorable theme of Georgian fantasy writers as well (for example, see Sichinava 1991). Although this idea corresponded poorly to the historical reality, it laid the groundwork for the Georgian concept that the Georgian state emerged in the east Black Sea region two thousand years earlier than the Abkhazian state.

The development of an early Georgian state is one of the core ideas of the Georgian myth of the past, which is deeply rooted in the Georgian mind. When, for the first time in the Soviet period, they declared of the celebration of a Day of National State Restoration in Georgia in 1989, the newspaper, “Zaria Vostoka”, the main organ of the CC CPG, published a long article on the history of the Georgian state. The author of the article claimed that the Georgian state had emerged earlier than elsewhere in Europe. He referred to the Argonaut myth as evidence of “early Colchis”. He granted this the implausible date of the 15th century B.C. He went even further and maintained that there were historical proofs of its Georgian origin (Tukhashvili 1989).

Qulhai and Diauekhi, highlighted by the Academician Melikishvili, seemed to be dwarfs in comparison with this early “Georgian state”. Yet, in order to demonstrate political continuity, the author mentioned both these “states” and even recalled “semi-Georgian Urartu”. The author maintained that the “history of Georgia was consistent and almost continuous. The general line of Colchis culture was unbroken for 3,500 years. The political life of Iberia also had the long duration of 2,300 years. The Georgian language did not change much (although the Georgian writing system was reformed several times in the early 1st Millennium A.D., and contemporary Georgians cannot read early manuscripts without special training! V. Sh.), and this was also true of their religion (although Christianity was introduced in the 4th century, and entirely replaced the earlier belief system! V. Sh.) and national character (what can be the meaning of this notion in early medieval times or earlier? V. Sh.)”. The author pointed to the very dynamic historical processes that caused the declines of empires, the disappearance of early peoples, language replacement, etc. Yet he claimed “all the attributes of a nation and a national state were immutable in Georgia”. All of this manifests the very essence of the Georgian national myth, which Georgians are unable to give up. In the meantime, the development of independent Abkhazia would be a serious challenge to this myth, and it is no accident that the author (Tukhashvili 1989) skipped over the Abkhazian

Kingdom.

The idea of the early Colchians and their glorious state dominates Georgian politicians. In his report of the events in Georgia in the early 1990s, B. Gugushvili, former Prime Minister of the Gamsakhurdia government and a member of the Board of Ministers of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, identified the Colchians with the direct descendants of the Svans and Mingrelians. He based himself on the aforementioned idea of the “dual aboriginality” and argued that the Abkhazians lived only in the highlands and hilly flanks and that the Mingrelians always occupied the seashore between the Rioni River and the city of Sochi. He argued that the Migrelians who lived in Abkhazia called themselves the “Abkhazians”, that the bulk of the Abkhazians were close to the Migrelians in terms of culture, were fluent in Mingrelian and also originated from the Colchians. In his view, Stalin’s regime persecuted both the Georgians and the Abkhazians in order to encourage separatism (sic! V. Sh.) and to provoke ethnic conflicts. He claimed equal human rights for them; yet, he disliked the existence of the Abkhazian republic, and he treated its establishment in 1921 as a crime against Georgia (Gugushvili 1997: 93-96).

The very name the “Qolha” proved to be important to contemporary Georgians, as well. In 1990, a Black Sea commercial consortium embracing several major Georgian industrial enterprises appropriated it. Its goal was to develop the infrastructure in the coastal regions between Batumi and Gagra.

In 2000, Georgia was planning to celebrate the 3,000th anniversary of the Georgian state, and the Georgian parliament assigned a special budget for that. This means that the idea of the Colchis Kingdom is appreciated by contemporary Georgian politicians, who use it in the formation of the contemporary Georgian identity (for example, see Chabukiani 1995: 15). Thus, the Argonaut myth, which has occupied a firm position in Georgian social memory for a long time, proved to be much stronger than all the reasoning of the Georgian scholars about early Phrygia, Diauekhi and other early political formations by “early Georgian tribes”. Yet, there are no good grounds for the identification of the characters in the myth with Georgians (for that, see Colarusso 1995: 76).

Recently, Georgians have enjoyed a new point for pride that is also closely connected with the recent achievements of Georgian archaeologists. Since the 1970s, Azerbaijan has enjoyed glorification as the region where the earliest traces of humans (a mandible of *Pithecanthropus* at the cave of Azykh, Nagorny Karabagh) have been discovered in the territory of the USSR. It had to give up this place to Georgia in the very late 1990s. At that time, Georgian archaeologists discovered the remains of *Homo erectus*, dating to 1,700,000 years ago. An exhibition was arranged in Tbilisi in mid-October 2000 to show the “earliest European” to the entire world. Thus, Georgia manifested its aspiration to identify itself with Europe and to enter the European community. The special role of the exhibition was emphasized by a visit by the Georgian president, E. A. Shevardnadze.

CHAPTER 6

TURCHANINOV'S "DISCOVERY"

At the time when Georgian scholars were building up the myth of the earliest Georgian state in Colchis, an event occurred that might undermine the very basis of the Georgian view of Georgian history. In contrast, it encouraged the Abkhazians to develop their own view of the past that was quite different from the Georgian one. In 1960, a stone with enigmatic signs was found in a small village near Maikop (Republic of Adygheia). A stone was discovered by a native resident while he was working his plot of land. This man's son showed the stone to his schoolteacher, and the latter passed it on to the Adygheian Research Institute. The stone would have lain forever in the Institute's warehouse with other archaeological materials, if it had not been shown in early 1963 to the ethnographer, L. I. Lavrov, a well-known specialist in Caucasian epigraphy. He brought the stone to Leningrad and showed it to the major Soviet experts in early writing systems. The specialists agreed unanimously that the stone represented some unknown writing system, but the inscription was too short to be deciphered without any additional materials for comparison.

Professor G. F. Turchaninov of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Linguistic Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences took responsibility for deciphering it. He compared the inscription with pseudo-hieroglyphic texts from Byblos, and related some signs to Hittite hieroglyphics. Referring to paleography, he dated the inscription to the 13th – 12th centuries B.C. and related it to the Colchians, who once lived in the northwestern Caucasus. What was most surprising was that, in Turchaninov's view, the inscription was easily read in Abkhazian. He argued that it told of the city of Aea, situated somewhere on the flanks of some hills, where the local ruler had his residence. Turchaninov related the inscription to the Argonaut myth, speculated on possible contacts between the early Abkhazians and the Phoenicians and Hittites, and went so far as to identify the historical Sinds, who lived on the Taman' peninsula in the classical period, with the Abkhazians. Concerning the early city mentioned in the inscription, he supposed that one should search for it in the Belaia River Valley in the territory of Adygheia (Turchaninov 1965a, 1966, 1971: 11-33). Providing this proved true, it demanded radical revision of early Colchis history: first, the Colchians turned to be Abkhazians; second, their lands extended far northward – up to the Taman' peninsula and the Kuban' River; third, they already had their own state and writing system in the Late Bronze Age.

The Colchis Kingdom was turning out to be a real historical fact; yet, not the one that the Georgian scholars were dreaming of. It looked like it was going to be the early Abkhazian Kingdom.

Turchaninov's hypothesis created a sensation. It was picked up by both the local and central media: they read of the discovery of the earliest writing system to be found in the territory of the USSR that turned out to be Abkhazian. The borders of the "earliest Abkhazian Kingdom" reaching as far as the hilly flanks of the northwestern Caucasus also attracted a lot of attention (Pachulia 1963a, 1963b; Informatsiia 1965). In 1963, Turchaninov gave a lecture on his discovery to a special meeting of the Scholarly Council of the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History in Sukhumi, where his conclusions were acknowledged as an "important scholarly discovery" (Pachulia 1963a). In December 1963, the Moscow "Literaturnaia Gazeta" addressed well-known Soviet scholars for their comments. One of them (professor I. N. Vinnikov) was critical of Turchaninov's views and recommended that readers should be cautious. Some others (the Academicians I. I. Meshchaninov and V. V. Struve) were more optimistic, although they thought that Turchaninov's reading of the inscription should be checked by other specialists in Abkhazian. Abkhazian authors (G. Dzidzaria, Sh. Inal-Ipa, M. Trapsh) maintained that the text was fairly comprehensible to Abkhazians and had no doubt that the use of Abkhazian covered a much more extensive territory in the past than it does nowadays. Finally, the Adygheian scholar, the Director of the Adygheian Research Institute, M. Autlev, was not convinced that the inscription should be ascribed to the Abkhazians alone and thought that one should speak of common Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors (Maikopskaia nakhodka 1963).

At the meantime, a joint team of Adygheian and Abkhazian archaeologists carried out a study of the area where the stone had been found. The result of their study was frustrating to those who were so very excited about the sensational information about the "earliest writing system". It was established that an early Maeotian settlement had once flourished in the area of the finding, and the stone could not be dated earlier than the last third of the 3rd century B.C. An Adygheian archaeologist emphasized that this was an "early Adyghe" settlement (Autlev 1965; 1966. Also see Pachulia 1963a).

Discussions in scholarly publications evoked even more skepticism. A leading specialist in Caucasian archaeology, Ye. I. Krupnov, pointed out that our knowledge of the Colchis archaeological culture of the western Caucasus provided no grounds at all for any hypothesis about an early local state in the late 2nd Millennium B.C. There were even fewer reasons to assume that the local tribes enjoyed a writing system particularly in Abkhazian, in prehistoric times. After he had taken part in the exploration of the area of the finding, he confirmed that the stone should be dated no earlier than the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. Moreover, he mentioned that certain Abkhazian specialists acknowledged that they believed Turchaninov's promising constructions too hasty (Krupnov 1964, 1965).

The leading Soviet specialist in the dead languages of the Near East, I. M.

Diakonov, pointed to Turchaninov's methodological faults and implausible conclusions. In his view, the time was still not ripe for deciphering of the Maikop Stone (Diakonov 1966). L. I. Lavrov also remarked that Turchaninov's approach was generally unsophisticated, which had already led to earlier errors. He demonstrated that Turchaninov's hypothesis did not correspond to any other data of northwestern Caucasian history at hand (Lavrov 1966: 18, 1967).

These responses did not affect Turchaninov at all, and he did not correct any of his conclusions. Instead, he turned his efforts to accusing his opponents of being incompetent. He stretched some points and distorted others' views. He interpreted the cautious and evasive reviews of certain specialists as though they supported him. He also argued that the stone in question could have been brought to the area where it was found from some earlier site. He pointed to the archaeologists' views that a much more extensive area had been occupied by the Adyghe tribes in the Early Iron Age. In his mind, this might confirm his conclusions. He implausibly identified the Adyghe with the Abkhazians. He recalled Milikishvili's hypothesis about the Qulhai state but failed to mention that Melikishvili located the latter in a narrow area of the southeastern Black Sea region. In order to confirm his approach, Turchaninov referred to the new finding of a similar inscription in Sukhumi, where it was dated to the 2nd century B.C., i.e. precisely like the Maeotian settlement where the earlier inscription was found. This did not cause him to change his initial chronological estimate (Turchaninov 1965b, 1966, 1971: 3-8). Moreover, while discussing the area of the Maikop Stone finding in his later book, Turchaninov made no reference neither to the Maeotian nature of the local proto-historic settlement, nor to its archaeological date (Turchaninov 1971: 31). Instead, he put forward a new sensational idea. He argued that, while analyzing the Sukhumi inscription, he had found the Abkhazian term "Akwa" as well as the name of the Abkhazian settlement of Lykhny. Although, in his own chronological estimates, the two findings were separated by a period of 1,000 years, he convinced the reader that there were no radical changes neither in the Abkhazian language nor in the boundaries of the territory occupied by the Abkhazian ancestors during all this time (Turchaninov 1971: 33-42).

Fascinated with all these constructions, Turchaninov went so far as to attempt to read proto-Byblos texts in Abkhazian. He actually managed to do it! The latter by no means caused him to doubt his methodology. On the contrary, it allowed him to conclude that the Abkhazian writing system had developed in the 3rd Millennium B.C. He claimed that early Abkhazian had affected the formation of the Phoenician writing system (Turchaninov 1971: 115-116). All of this sounded very suspicious to the specialists (for example, see G. Lordkipanidze 1978: 133-136), and, apparently, it is no accident that Turchaninov's book was not reviewed at all. At the same time, as Turchaninov expected, his ideas were greatly appreciated by certain Abkhazian authors, who cited them (Shakryl 1965: 220; Inal-Ipa 1964: 8, 1965: 86-87, 1976: 125; Gogua 1989: 158).

A new book on the early writing systems of the Caucasus and Europe, that

Turchaninov promised to publish, never came out for several reasons. First, the Division of Literature and Language of the USSR Academy of Sciences received several negative reviews of it, written by professional linguists in the very early 1980s. One of them was the well-known Georgian linguist T. V. Gamkrelidze, who reasonably accused the author of using the facts of contemporary language erroneously in order to decipher early writings, and of neglecting to use the very sophisticated reconstruction methodology developed by contemporary historical linguists (Gamkrelidze 1989). Another Georgian scholar demonstrated that the Sukhumi plate was actually a fragment of Roman brick, which could not be dated earlier than the 1st century A.D. (G. Lordkipanidze 1978: 134-135). Second, and even more important, was that the book was to be published in what were troubled years in Abkhazia. They decided in the Leningrad Branch of the "Nauka" Publishing House that the publication of this book during the time of turmoil, in 1977 – 1978, would exacerbate Georgian-Abkhazian tensions. Thus, the publication of the book was delayed forever (for that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 220).

While objecting to the critical remarks of the specialists, Turchaninov recognized the social importance of his constructions. He wrote: "When a new written source is interpreted or published, be it an Abkhazian, Ossetian or Circassian (Adyghe) one, not only specialists are interested in it, but all local intellectuals irrespective of their professions". Indeed, a "writing system as an indicator of ethnic maturity serves one of the most important features of a people's cultural history" (Turchaninov 1971: 3). There is no doubt that Turchaninov's interpretation of the findings in question was greatly affected by the ethno-political situation in Abkhazia. While he was a faithful student of the Academician Marr, he did his best to build up a great past for the Abkhazians and to help them in their struggle against Georgian historiography. As we shall see further on, all of this affected both the Abkhazian view of their early past and their collective self-awareness in general. It is no accident that one of the last reports of Turchaninov's discoveries was published by the Abkhazian media in February 1989 (Turchaninov 1989), i.e. when Georgian-Abkhazian tensions were about at their climax.

CHAPTER 7

THE ABKHAZIANS IN A STRUGGLE FOR THE “RIGHT” PAST

Abkhazian scholarship only developed after World War II. Before the revolution, only enthusiastic amateur authors were interested in the history and ethnography of Abkhazia. A small archaeological museum was organized at the highlanders' school in Sukhum before the Russian-Turkish war of 1876-1877, but it was removed during a period of war and disappeared. At the same time, it would be incorrect to maintain that nobody was interested in Abkhazian antiquities in the Russian Empire. However, this interest was of a very limited nature – Christian relics and to a lesser extent the ruins of classical cities were most studied. The Abkhazians themselves were not involved in that (Storozhev 1925).

In the 1920s, due to the rapid development of regional studies, the number of enthusiasts increased greatly, but their training was still very poor. In 1922, those involved in regional studies established the Abkhazian Scientific Society (ASS) in Sukhum, which embraced everybody who was fond of Abkhazian culture. Many outstanding Abkhazians were among its members, from high officials (N. Lakoba) to cultural activists and teachers (D. Gulia, S. Chanba, S. Ashkhatsava, S. Basaria etc.) (Pachulia 1976: 32). At the same time, although protection of historical monuments was one of its goals, the ASS had no special division focused on history and archaeology. Obviously, the Division of Geography and Ethnography was responsible for these fields. Nonetheless, despite apparent interest in the past, its studies were poorly organized, and no lectures given in the ASS in 1924 discussed historical issues.

Yet, the ASS had managed to arrange the very successful 1st Congress of Activists in the Regional Study of the Black Sea region and western Caucasus, held in Sukhum in September 1924. This was the largest of all the provincial congresses of this sort that took place in 1924. There was a large number of participants (188 people), and the Congress was chaired by the Academician Marr himself. Marr's participation was great luck for the Abkhazians. He focused all his energy on Abkhazian studies (Marr 1938), and the Academy of Abkhazian Language and Culture was founded under his initiative in 1925. In 1931, the Institute of Abkhazian Culture (later renamed the Abkhazian Research Institute) was established at the basis of the ASS. In 1924, the Abkhazian State Museum was formed in Sukhum, which had a Division of History and Archaeology. All of these

agencies were actively collecting primary data on Abkhazian history, archaeology and ethnography, although most of these materials were unprocessed and the local researchers avoided making wide generalizations (Inal-Ipa 1965: 13-18, 23-24).

In fact, one is able to talk of an Abkhazian historical school only after the period that commenced in the early 1950s. Two Abkhazian scholars were heavily involved in the study of early Abkhazian history in the 1950s – 1970s. They were the historian, Z. V. Anchabadze, and the ethnographer, Sh. D. Inal-Ipa. Z. V. Anchabadze (1920-1984) was, perhaps, the most remarkable Abkhazian historian of the late 20th century. He was born in Gagra, to a family that was closely related to certain well-known Georgian families. His career developed smoothly. After graduation from the Sukhum State Pedagogical Institute, he was a postgraduate student at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, where the leading Georgian scholars, S. Dzhanashia and N. Berdzenishvili, were among his tutors. When Abkhazia was suffering in the 1940s, he managed to defend his Candidate in History thesis, which was focused on such hot and less-known issue as “Mingrelia and Abkhazia in the 17th century” (1948). In 1960, he defended his Doctor of History thesis on Abkhazian medieval history. Anchabadze was on good terms with Georgian authorities, his academic career developed quite successfully, and he rapidly climbed the administrative ladder. From 1956 – 1958, he headed the Department of History and Ethnography at the Abkhazian Research Institute of History, Language and Literature (ARIHLL), from 1958 – 1973 he was the Chairman of the Department on the Caucasian Highlanders at the Institute of History at the Georgian Academy of Sciences. From 1973 he was the Rector of the Sukhumi State Pedagogical Institute. In 1979, he was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (Togoshvili 1988: 3-9).

The aforementioned review of Ingoroqva's book was Anchabadze's first publication on the early history of Abkhazia (Anchabadze 1956). After that, he never failed to express his interest in early Abkhazia and the history of the Abkhazian people, and he published several books on that subject (Anchabadze 1959, 1964, 1976). His concept of Abkhazians' origins, their early medieval history and the historic role of the Abkhazian Kingdom was as follows.

In Anchabadze's view, two groups played major roles in the formation of the Abkhazian people, a local group and a group of newcomers. While thoroughly discussing the archaeological data from Abkhazia and Colchis in general, Anchabadze demonstrated the long continuity of cultural development and the richness of the local culture. In his view, this was evidence that Abkhazia was populated from the earliest time and that a fairly stable ethno-cultural entity had emerged there. It was the latter that were the basis of the formation of the Abkhazian people. At the same time, he pointed to the important role of certain migrants from Asia Minor (they were related to the Kashka and Abeshla of the Assyrian sources) who mixed with the local inhabitants in the 2nd Millennium B.C. and passed to them their own language and higher culture (Anchabadze 1964: 120-

128, 1976: 19-23; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 18-21). Thus, in Anchabadze's concept, the Abkhazians acquired the status of being the earliest population in Colchis, on the one hand, and became heirs of the cultural traditions of the Near Eastern early civilizations, on the other⁶⁷).

Concerning later periods, Anchabadze's views were also in some points different from those of the major Georgian historians. First, he had no doubt that such early medieval groups as the Abasgoi, Apsilae, Misimianoï and Sanigai (he identified them with the Heniokhoi) could be identified with the Abkhazian ancestors (Anchabadze 1959: 6-22, 1964: 136-137, 169-179, 1976: 30-39, 44-45; Anchabadze 1986: 27-28)⁶⁸). With reference to early cultural continuity, he denied that the Abkhazian ancestors had arrived in Colchis only in the first centuries A.D. and insisted that they had to be considered an indigenous population par excellence. He was especially struck by the archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da, where an archaeological culture of local origin was discovered. He suggested that it should be called the "Apsilae culture", since the territory of the historical Apsilae was located there by classical authors. At the same time, he emphasized that the northwestern movement of the Mingrelian-Chan tribes was observed in the first centuries A.D., when they began to settle in southern Abkhazia (Anchabadze 1964: 181-183, 1976: 39-41; Gunba 1989a: 143; Inal-Ipa 1992: 84-86)⁶⁹).

Second, he objected to the representation of the early Abkhazian ancestors as backward tribes and maintained that they were a socially differentiated community to the extent that an early class society had emerged among them. That is why he preferred to call them small nations (*narodnosti*) rather than tribes, and taught that they represented separate autonomous communities ruled by their own kings, although they were somewhat dependent on either Lazica or Byzantium (Anchabadze 1959: 22, 29-33, 1964: 183, 202-204, 1976: 46; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 38).

Third, he believed that a uniform Abkhazian people had formed from all four of the aforementioned groups led by the Abasgoi, who had built up a large and strong principality by the mid-8th century. Yet, the language of these people had formed on the foundation of the Apsilian dialect (Anchabadze 1959: 62-69, 1976: 48-52; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 42; Dzidzaria 1960: 63-64).

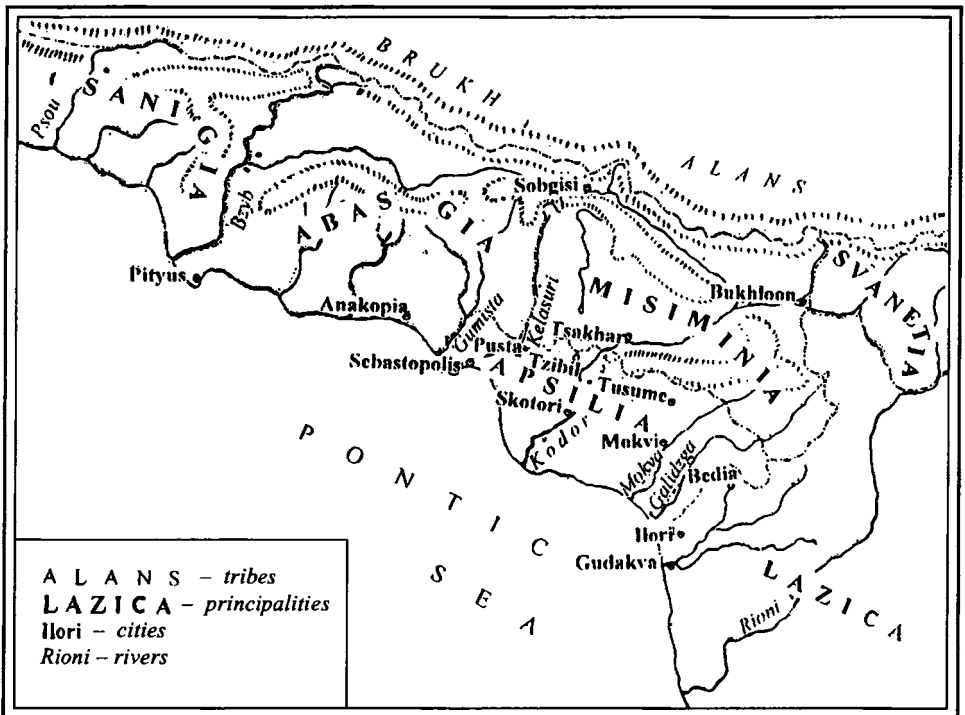
Fourth, Anchabadze objected to Ingoroqva's view that the first Abkhazian kings were Laz (i.e. Georgian) in origin. Anchabadze claimed that they were ethnic Abkhazians (Anchabadze 1959: 78-80).

Fifth, he pointed out that, from the very beginning, the Abkhazian Kingdom was heterogeneous in its ethnic composition. Besides the Abkhazians, it included the Laz (Mingrelians), Kartes, and Adyghes. The Kartvelians dominated there numerically; they were also more advanced in cultural terms. That is why the Georgian language finally won out and the Georgian writing system spread widely within the Kingdom. All of this had occurred by the early 9th century. Yet, even after the Abkhazian Kingdom emerged and up to the mid-9th century, the Abkhazian Church was within the ecclesiastical sphere of the Constantinople

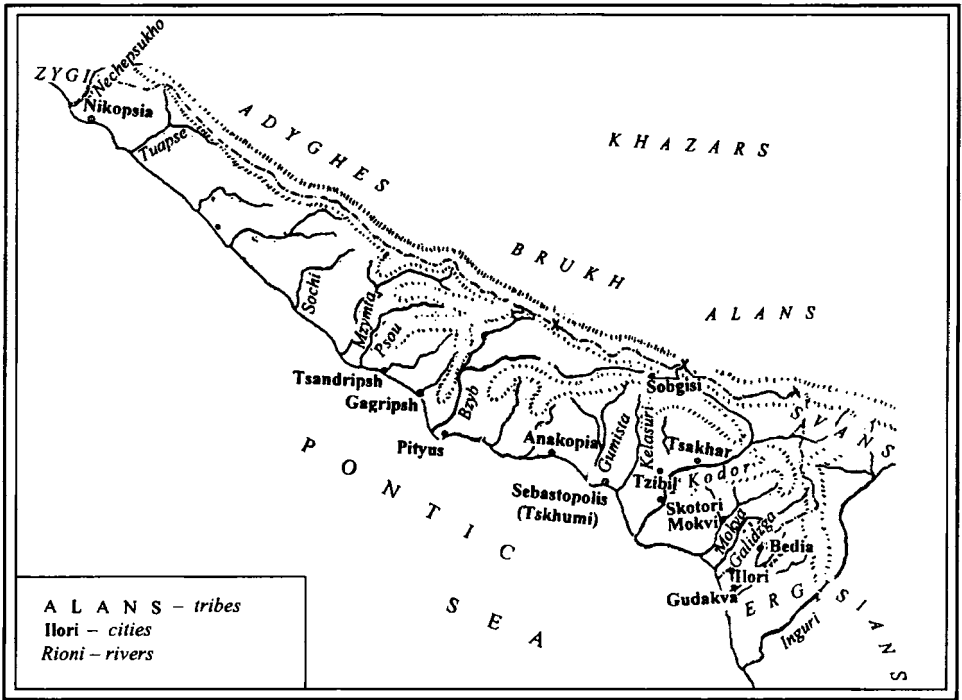
patriarch. A merger of the eastern and western Georgian Churches commenced only after this date (Anchabadze 1959: 105-108, 146-151, 1976: 53).

Sixth, following Dzhanashia, Anchabadze demonstrated that the meaning of the terms “Abkhazia” and the “Abkhazians” had changed over time. After a unified Abkhazian principality emerged in the 730s – 740s A.D., all its territory was called “Abasgia”, and its population was called the “Abkhazians” (maps 18-19). Later on, after the Abkhazian Kingdom was established in the 870s, the term “Abkhazia” was applied to all its territory, including western Georgia (map 20). Moreover, after that time, the term “Abkhazians” was used for all of the Kingdom’s population, rather than to refer only to the ethnic Abkhazians. Thus, Anchabadze shared the Georgian view of the “all-Georgian line of the cultural and religious policy of the Abkhazian Kingdom” (Anchabadze 1959: 117-118, 152-153, 1976: 54-55, 57-58; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 46). He warned against the exaggeration of the Abkhazians’ role in the Abkhazian Kingdom and seemed to agree with Dzhanashia, who called the Abkhazian Kingdom a “west Georgian formation” (Anchabadze 1959: 157-159). At the same time, it seemed important to him to emphasize that the Abkhazians did not merge with the Georgians even during the period of the united Georgian state, let alone during other historical periods (Anchabadze 1976: 61-63).

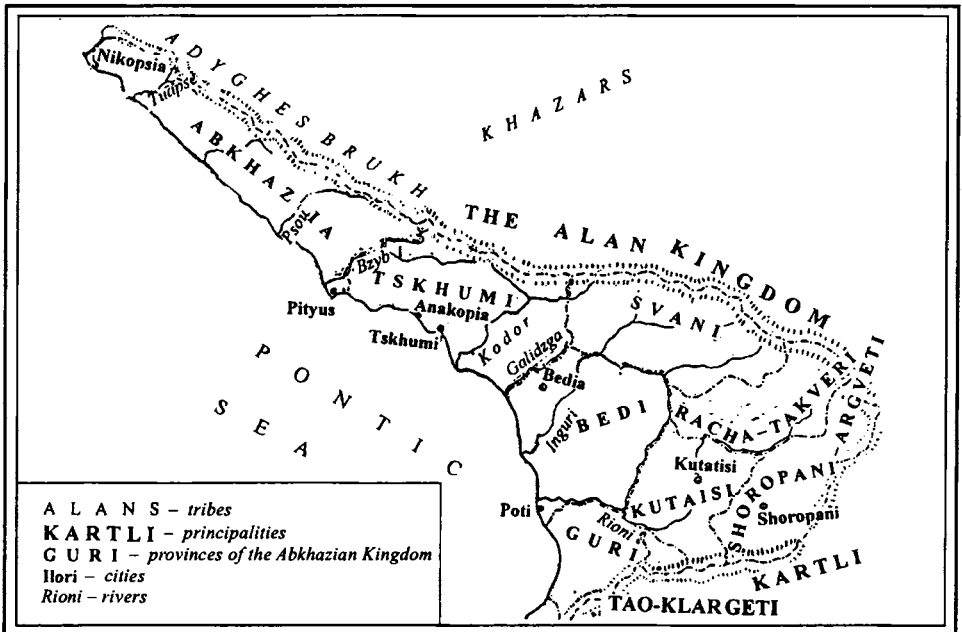
To put it differently, Anchabadze did his best to find a compromise approach that suited both the Georgians and the Abkhazians. Indeed, he was completing his



Map 18 Abkhazia in the 7th – 8th centuries A.D. (after Anchabadze 1959)



Map 19 The Abkhazian principality in the 8th century A.D. (after Anchabadze 1959)



Map 20 The Abkhazian Kingdom in the 9th century A.D. (after Anchabadze 1959)

first book at the time of the scandal caused by discussion of Ingoroqva's concept. The period that followed was distinguished by tense Georgian-Abkhazian relationships. It is also possible that Anchabadze was under heavy Georgian pressure. This is demonstrated by the fact that he did not restrict himself only to critical remarks with respect to Ingoroqva's book; where it was possible, he referred positively to its ideas. No other Abkhazian scholar had done that. It is also worth noting that all his life Anchabadze was an advocate of the Iberian-Caucasian linguistic and "ethnic" family (Anchabadze 1964: 122, 1976: 17-18; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 19).

The life of Sh. D. Inal-Ipa (1916-1996) was much harder than that of Anchabadze. Born to an Abkhazian noble family, with a brother who was repressed by Stalin, he had to hide his origins for a long time. He had no future in Abkhazia of the very late 1930s, and he went to Moscow, where he managed to enter the Historical Faculty of the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute. After having received good training as an historian in Moscow, he became a postgraduate student in the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography at the Georgian Academy of Sciences under the supervision of the well-known Georgian ethnographer, G. S. Chitaia. After that time, he was always interested in the history and culture of the Abkhazian people. His scholarly career developed within the ARIHLL, which he was affiliated with from 1949, with a focus on the traditional Abkhazian culture and the Abkhazian people's origins. His Doctor of History thesis (1962) was based on his seminal book, "The Abkhazians", which is still the only scholarly work providing a holistic approach to the history of the Abkhazians and their traditional way of life and culture. Inal-Ipa's ethnographic publications were never addressed to the academic community alone, they were continuously discussed by the general public and affected Abkhazian national self-awareness a great deal. Indeed, they emphasized the authenticity of the Abkhazian people, which was a powerful argument in favor of their right to independent development. Moreover, Inal-Ipa was active in the writing of appeals to the authorities of the USSR in defense of the Abkhazian language and culture as well as for upgrading the political status of Abkhazia. Georgian officials were by no means happy with that, and publication of his chief books on the early history of the Abkhazian people brought about new problems, rather than satisfaction to their author (Anchabadze, Reshetov 1996).

Indeed, in contrast to cautious Anchabadze, Inal-Ipa was more inclined to develop an Abkhaziocentric view. As has been noted, the book, "The Abkhazians (historical-ethnographic essays)" (1965) was his most fundamental work, which focused on a comprehensive discussion of all aspects of traditional Abkhazian culture. In this book, he did not skip the issue of the origins of the Abkhazians and their early history. These were extensively discussed in several chapters. The first time he presented his views about the early history of the Abkhazian people, it was a highly condensed version given at the VII International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Moscow in 1964 (Inal-Ipa 1964). Later on, he returned to this theme in his book, "The Issues of the

Ethnocultural History of the Abkhazians” (Inal-Ipa 1976). Although he did not fail to address all the required compliments to Georgian historiography, he was not satisfied with many of its points, and complained that Abkhazia was neglected in Georgian textbooks of history to the extent that it was altogether missing in certain important chapters. He also objected to certain of Melikishvili’s hypotheses on the composition of the population in early Colchis and, in particular, to the picture of the Abkhazian ancestors’ arrival from over the Caucasian mountain ridge during the first centuries A.D. He was even less satisfied with the view, common in Georgian historiography, that all the early tribes of the east Black Sea region had to be identified with Georgian ancestors which, in his view, entirely ignored the Abkhazian presence within the region (Inal-Ipa 1965: 22-23, 1976: 44-50, 222-225).

While developing his concepts on the formation and early history of the Abkhazian people, Inal-Ipa emphasized the following points. First, the dolmen culture of the Early Bronze Age could have been built up by the remote ancestors of the Abkhazian-Adyghe peoples (Inal-Ipa 1964: 2, 1965: 29, 81-82, 1976: 79 ff.). Second, therefore, Abkhazia was the homeland of the Abkhazians, which was proven by its very name, containing the root “ps” closely linked with such Abkhazian notions as “Abkhazian”, “soul”, “homeland”, and “ancestor”. Inal-Ipa reminded his readers that the Abkhazians called themselves the “Apsua”, and their homeland, “Apsny”. Moreover, he found the same root in such ethnic names as the “Apsars” (Georgian Chronicle of the 13th century) and the “Apsilae” (Roman authors in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D.) (Inal-Ipa 1976: 354-355). Third, until the mid-19th century, all the territory of Abkhazia between the Inguri River and the Mzymta River was occupied mainly by an Abkhazian population (Inal-Ipa 1965: 46-47). To put it differently, the Abkhazians lived in Abkhazia continuously from prehistoric times up to the end of the Caucasian War, after which the ethno-demographic situation drastically changed unfavorably to them. Moreover, with a reference to Georgian linguists, Inal-Ipa wrote of an Abkhazian sub-stratum in the Mingrelian-Chan language, hence, of the impact of Abkhazian on the Georgian language (Inal-Ipa 1964: 5, 1965: 57).

It is interesting to note that, while discussing the ethnogenesis and ethnic history of the Abkhazian people, Inal-Ipa paid attention mainly to the earliest periods, i.e. the Golden Age; he was less interested in the periods of decline, when the Abkhazians were subjugated to foreign powers. Whereas 81 pages of his thick volume were devoted to a description of the archaeological sites and an analysis of the earlier history up to the 10th century, the events of the 13th – 18th centuries were covered by only 5 pages (Inal-Ipa 1965). Thus, he avoided thoroughly analyzing two important periods when contemporary Abkhazian culture was actually formed, one when Abkhazia was part of a united Georgian state for more than two centuries, and the another during later Turkish rule. Indeed, the author, who belonged to an ethnic minority, was aware how difficult it was to analyze the later historical periods and manage to avoid conflict with the official viewpoint

represented by Georgian historiography. Only in the early 1990s did Inal-Ipa get a chance to express openly his views on the Abkhazian history of the later centuries (Inal-Ipa 1992). At the same time, he failed to avoid being on bad terms with Georgian historiography for years.

While bearing in mind the Georgian view, which is well-known to us, Inal-Ipa did his best to advocate the idea of the indigenous origins of the Abkhazians. How did he do that? First, he referred extensively to the archaeological data, in the belief that there was a precise correspondence between an archaeological culture and an ethnic group (Inal-Ipa 1976: 99); he also believed in a long cultural continuity in the territory of Abkhazia from at least the 5th Millennium B.C. onward (Inal-Ipa 1976: 101-102). He pointed to the importance of iron and smithing in Abkhazian religious beliefs, and treated that as the heritage of early metal-workers, whose traces were discovered in the rich archaeological sites of Abkhazia, dated to the Bronze Age. He was convinced that Abkhazia was the main metallurgical center of early Colchis. In order to make the analogies with the Abkhazians more convincing, he supposed that the Colchis inhabitants of the Early Iron Age occupied themselves with transhumance pastoralism, as the Abkhazians had done in the recent past (Inal-Ipa 1965: 68-70, 74). Furthermore, he compared the area of the Bronze Age dolmens with a map of Abkhazian and Adyghe settlements, and found striking correlations between them. Therefore, he had identified the dolmen builders with the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors (Inal-Ipa 1965: 36, 1976: 79-100. Also see Markovin 1974: 5, 48-52).

Second, he emphatically denied any mass tribal movements in the east Black Sea region during the classical period. He remarked that there was no archaeological evidence of that at all, and, while referring to Marr's view, assumed that the territory occupied by the Abkhazians in the remote past was much more extensive than it was nowadays, encompassing the southeast Black Sea region (Inal-Ipa 1965: 75-81, 1976: 111, 113)⁷⁰. That was the same region, which, in the Melikishvili's view, had played a crucial role in the formation of the early Georgian population! Yet, Inal-Ipa was looking for compromise with the Georgian approach and wrote that the west Georgian (Mingrelian-Chan) and Abkhazian tribes were represented on equal terms among the bearers of the Colchis archaeological culture. At the same time, he assumed that similarities between the Colchis culture of the east Black Sea region and the Koban culture of the Central Caucasus reflected the linguistic unity of their builders (Inal-Ipa 1964: 2-3, 1965: 82)!

Third, while emphasizing indigenous Abkhazian-Adyghe origins in the east Black Sea region, Inal-Ipa did not give up the idea of "relatives" in Asia Minor as well. Not only did he refer to the historical evidence of the Kashka and Abeshla in early Asia Minor, but he also pointed to the ethnographic cultural parallels between the Abkhazian-Adyghes and the Hittites, and emphasized the great political and cultural importance of the Kashka in Asia Minor in the late 2nd Millennium B.C. Thus, in his view, the Abkhazian-Adyghe settlement embraced a huge territory between the Central Caucasus and the northern and northeastern regions of Asia

Minor in the Late Bronze Age (Inal-Ipa 1964: 3-5, 1965: 83-85, 1976: 122-133, 144-145). It is easy to see that this area corresponded to a major extent with the one depicted by the Georgian historians as the initial territory of the early Georgian tribes. Yet, in Inal-Ipa's view, the "vast territory between the central part of the northern Caucasus and the southern Black Sea region was occupied mainly by the Abkhazian-Adyghe and the related Abeshla-Kashka tribes during the 3rd Millennium B.C. and almost all of the 2nd Millennium B.C., whereas the Kartvelian ethnic element arrived in the eastern and southern Black Sea regions much later than the Kaska". He argued that there were no Georgian-speaking tribes at all in the Colchis and Pontus regions before the 8th century B.C. (Inal-Ipa 1976: 117-118)⁷¹. Moreover, he included the Tibareni and even the Hayasa-Azzi inhabitants, who lived in the Çoroh River Basin, in the early Abkhazian-Adyghe entity (Inal-Ipa 1976: 128-129)⁷².

All of this could well provoke an angry response from Georgian scholars. Therefore, Inal-Ipa was unable to skip this hot issue, and, in order to placate them, he acknowledged that "related Abkhazian-Adyghe-Kartvelian tribes" lived in this region. He emphasized though that this solution was a contribution to the friendship of peoples (Inal-Ipa 1965: 85). In fact, it was a tribute to Soviet Georgian censorship, which could not tolerate a confrontation between the Abkhazian and Georgian scholars and made every effort to ease the tension. At the same time, in his later book, published in 1976, Inal-Ipa put forth his own distinct view more persistently and confidently than he did in the first one.

In search of arguments in favor of the idea of long Abkhazian development in the region in question, Inal-Ipa could not but being tempted by Turchaninov's promising "discovery". For the first time, he referred to it in his paper on the Abkhazian ethnogenesis, delivered at the VII International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Moscow in 1964. He regularly went back to it in his major books thereafter (Inal-Ipa 1964: 8, 1965: 86-87, 1976: 125, 202)⁷³.

Fourth, Inal-Ipa analyzed the list of early east Black Sea region tribes that were mentioned by classical writers. In contrast to Georgian historians, he identified many of these tribes with the early Abkhazians. He emphasized the continuity of ethnic names in the territory of Abkhazia that could serve as one more argument in favor of the autochthonist approach (Inal-Ipa 1965: 86-90, 96-97). At the same time, he initially attempted to concede to the Georgian view, and remarked that a substantial part of the Colchis Kingdom was occupied by the west Georgian (Mingrelian-Chan) tribes (Inal-Ipa 1965: 91). Yet, he failed to explain how it was possible for two populations with very different languages, who lived for a long time at the same territory, not to mix. Even if he was eager to, he was unable to do that because the contemporary ethno-political environment demanded the location of the early tribes in those very territories that their descendants live in nowadays. If the early historical sources contradicted this idea, it was just so much the worse for those sources. All of this put the historian in an ambiguous position. Hence

came the endless contradictions in the works of Inal-Ipa and his counterparts.

At the same time, Inal-Ipa did not fail to emphasize proudly the Abkhazian-Adyge contribution to the formation of the Transcaucasian languages and cultures. In particular, he referred to Abkhazian place names in western Georgia, the traces of Abkhazian impact upon Georgian, and finally, the Abkhazian nickname, Lasha, of Queen Tamar's son. Actually, as we know, Georgian historians themselves mentioned all these facts (Inal-Ipa 1964: 5-6, 1965: 99-100, 135, 1976: 214, 383-388)⁷⁴).

Inal-Ipa linked the political development of the Abkhazians in the 1st Millennium A.D. with several small principalities that initially were in some dependence either on Lazica, or on Byzantium, but were moving towards independence over the course of the late 1st Millennium A.D. This was proven by a seal with a Greek inscription that was found by archaeologists in Pitsunda in 1954. The inscription read that the seal belonged to the local ruler, Constantine of Abasgoi, who was considered an Abkhazian by Inal-Ipa (Inal-Ipa 1965: 113, 124; Dzidzaria 1961: 16). At that time, Abkhazia was strongly affected by the Byzantine culture, and the Greek language was extensively used in religious and commercial matters. That was confirmed by numerous Greek inscriptions found by the archaeologists in various areas of Abkhazia (Inal-Ipa 1965: 124).

While discussing the Abkhazian Kingdom, Inal-Ipa pointed out that the Abkhazians had played a major role in its formation. Indeed, it had emerged at the foundation of the previous Abkhazian Principality. It was headed by the Abkhazian Dynasty, and Abkhazia always enjoyed a prominent position in it. The first period of its development, when its capital was still in Anakopia, (contemporary New Afon), was called the "national period" by Inal-Ipa who, following Marr, stressed in this way that the Kingdom had emerged on an Abkhazian foundation. Later on, the King's residence was moved to Kutatisi (contemporary Kutaisi), a large Georgian population was included, and the Kingdom was gradually Georgianized. Yet, even referring to the later period, Inal-Ipa called it the "Abkhazian-Georgian state" rather than the "Georgian state" as was common in Georgian historiography. He pointed out that the Abkhazians continued playing an important political and military role in united Georgia. While doing this, he referred to not only the primary place of the Abkhazians in the King's title, but also to a coin of the 11th century, discovered by archaeologists, on which the inscription read: "Giorgi – King of the Abkhazians and the Georgians".

It seemed very important for Inal-Ipa to emphasize that Abkhazian-born activists played an active part in the development of the medieval Georgian culture. In this respect, he was attracted by the outstanding medieval theologian, Ioann Petritsi, who was considered a Georgian by Georgian scholars (Menabde 1968: 52; Berdzenishvili et al. 1950: 199, 1962: 214-215; Chabukiani 1995: 28). For his part, Inal-Ipa referred to a letter by a Byzantine philosopher who called Ioann Petritsi an "Abasgian grammarian" and, following Marr, considered this sufficient evidence to establish his Abkhazian identity (Inal-Ipa 1965: 134, 1976: 306-308. Also see

Gogua 1989: 158). As a result, he came to the conclusion that the “Abkhazians, an ethnically non-Georgian tribe, played an important role in the history of Georgia” (Inal-Ipa 1965: 130-132, 135, 1976: 399-413)⁷⁵). True, Inal-Ipa had to soften this with talk of Abkhazian-Georgian friendship during the period of the Abkhazian Kingdom and of the beneficial impact of the Georgian culture upon the Abkhazians (Inal-Ipa 1965: 134).

Inal-Ipa did his best to prove that the Abkhazian people formed at the basis of two ethnic elements, the late classical Abasgoi and the Apsilae, and that this had occurred in the late 1st Millennium A.D., especially during the course of the Abkhazian Kingdom’s emergence. He insisted that it was at that time that a uniform Abkhazian language emerged (Inal-Ipa 1965: 102, 132, 138; 1976: 396, 408), although he was aware that the Abkhazians enjoyed several fairly different dialects, even at the beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, he remarked that the Georgianization of the Abkhazians and their nobility developed in united Georgia, and that this factor had broken up the progressive process of the formation of the Abkhazian people (Inal-Ipa 1965: 139).

Thus, although being close to Anchabadze’s concept in some respects, Inal-Ipa’s views were apparently more Abkhazocentric. An even more radical and, at the same time, more inconsistent approach was developed by another Abkhazian scholar, Ye. S. Shakryl. While referring to the archaeological data, he argued that the Abkhazian-Adyghe tribes were a persistent agent of cultural development in the east Black Sea region since as long ago as Palaeolithic times. At the same time, he was searching for the ancestors of the Abkhazians and the Adyghe in Asia Minor among the Abeshla and the Kashka, respectively. He even insisted that the formation of the Abkhazians and the Adyghe as distinct ethnic groups had taken place in Asia Minor by the end of the 2nd Millennium B.C. Moreover, he assumed that they already had their own writing system at that time. Shakryl was an ardent advocate of the migrationist approach and believed that, while moving northwards from Asia Minor, the ancestors of the Abkhazians and the Adyghe once occupied all the Georgian territory that was reflected in its place names. In his enthusiasm, he went so far as to correct the classical authors and argued that the Apsilae were in the Colchis territory already by the 6th – 5th centuries B.C., despite the fact that earliest evidence of them was provided by Pliny the Elder in the 1st century A.D. Like Inal-Ipa, Shakryl appreciated Turchaninov’s “discovery”, as valuable proof of the Abkhazian-Adyghe’s long stay in the Caucasus (Shakryl 1965).

Finally, in the 1980s, the then young Abkhazian historian and future first president of Abkhazia, V. G. Ardzinba, who was a graduate student at the prestigious Institute of Oriental Studies at the USSR Academy of Sciences, advocated the idea that iron metallurgy was discovered by the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors. He based his ideas on folklore data collected by Inal-Ipa that demonstrated the important role of iron in traditional Abkhazian beliefs and rituals. Being a specialist in the early history of Asia Minor, Ardzinba located those early smiths in the very region where Mikeladze and other Georgian historians had not

found anybody but “Georgian” tribes (Chalybes and other) in the 2nd Millennium B.C. (Ardzinba 1983, 1988)⁷⁶).

While slightly different, all the Abkhazian versions of the ethnogenesis and early ethnic history of the Abkhazian people agreed with each other in several important respects. This makes it reasonable to try to formulate a view that expresses the Abkhazian picture of the remote past that has obvious differences from the Georgian view. The Abkhazian view, first, pointed to the deep local roots of the Abkhazian people in the territory of Abkhazia and strove to find confirmation of that in the archaeological data at hand. Second, Abkhazian scholars did not fail to refer to “Asia Minor relatives” or “ancestors” who played the role of culture heroes. Third, they saw the Abkhazian or the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors settled throughout vast territories, including those occupied nowadays by Georgians. Fourth, they identified many late classical and early medieval tribes of Colchis, most of all of the Apsilae and Abasgoi, with the Abkhazian ancestors. Fifth, they insisted on the relatively independent political development of the Abkhazians in the Early Middle Ages, which led to the emergence of the Abkhazian Kingdom, headed by its own Abkhazian-born kings. Sixth, they emphasized the significant role of the Abkhazians in the united Georgian state. Finally, they spoke of the formation of the Abkhazian people during the course of the emergence of the Abkhazian Kingdom, while emphasizing that this had occurred several centuries before the Georgian people emerged.

CHAPTER 8

THE ABKHAZIAN-GEORGIAN COMPETITION

Beginning at the very end of the 1970s, it had become fashionable in Georgia to organize annual meetings of local historians in order to demonstrate friendship and fruitful collaboration. The last of those meetings was held in Borzhomi in September 1986. The Georgian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian historians assured each other of their attachment to internationalism and lulled themselves with illusive successes in the field of history (Bol'shoi soviet 1986). It seemed that there was no sign of the coming storm.

All the materials analyzed above demonstrate the main differences between the Georgian and the Abkhazian views of the early history of the east Black Sea region. They concerned most of all the composition of the population of early Colchis. Georgian scholars found there primarily Georgian-speaking tribes, who occupied all the territory from time immemorial until the end of the classical period or perhaps even later. Thus, the Colchians, Kerketai, Heniokhoi, Misimianoï, Sanigai and sometimes even Abasgoi and Apsilae were identified with the Georgians (Inadze 1953: 18-19; Mikeladze 1974: 183, 1990: 79-80; Melikishvili 1959: 65, 91-93; Kaukhchishvili 1965: 28; Lomouri 1990: 161-163). For example, Mikeladze failed to find any Abkhazian ancestors in the east Black Sea regions in the 2nd – 1st Millennia B.C. (Mikeladze 1974: 185). Only a few Georgian authors dared to recognize that the Abkhazian-Adyge ancestors lived in western Georgia before the arrival of Kartvelian-speaking tribes there, or that the Colchian unity included numerous tribes speaking different languages (Dzhaparidze 1976; O. Lordkipanidze 1989: 185, 221). During the last Soviet decades, some Georgian scholars, following Ingoroqva, related the Abkhazian arrival in Abkhazia to the highlanders' invasion of the 17th century. Other more careful authors shared the concept of the "dual aboriginality". They assumed that two different ethnic entities, the Georgian ancestors and those of the Abkhazian-Adyge, occupied Colchis during two millennia (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 188; Lashkhia 1989; Lomouri 1990: 161, 166; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1993: 14-15, 31; Gvantseladze 1992). However, they, too, believed that the Abkhazian-Adyghes arrived there only in the first centuries A.D. in the course of the settlement of highlanders throughout the lowland, where only Kartvelians had lived before (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 326-335⁷⁷). It seems that in the last years of Soviet Georgia the concept of "dual aboriginality" had official support. In particular, it was shared by a professional archaeologist, the

Academician A. M. Apakidze, the vice-president of the Georgian Academy of Sciences.

The Georgian view of the early history of the east Black Sea region became an especially hot issue when the Svan-born historian, T. Sh. Mibchvani, got into the discussion. His book, having been published in the heat of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, manifested the appearance of a Svanocentric concept of the early history of Colchis. In his view, all the territory between the Çoroh River and the city of Gagra was initially Svan, whereas the Svans were the first Kartvelian tribe to settle in the east Black Sea region. He identified the Heniokhoi, Misimianoi and Sanigai of the classical authors with the Svans (Mibchvani 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b). In contrast to the orthodox Georgian view, he opposed Egrisi to Lazica. In his schema, Egrisi was an early Svan political formation, which was annexed by Lazica later on, and the local Svans were assimilated by the Mingrelians. He went so far as to claim that some of the contemporary Mingrelians still remembered their Svan origin. Moreover, while maintaining the historical nature of the Argonaut myth, he did his best to argue that early Greek seafarers had visited the Svan ancestors, rather than some Kartvelians in general. Thus, early Colchis turned out to be a Svan historical heritage. In order to confirm his view, Mibchvani analyzed place names and found Svan elements among them, not only in the southeast Black Sea region but even in the Gudauta area (Mibchvani 1989a), which the Abkhazians considered their own primordial territory, and where the government of their unrecognized republic is situated nowadays. In brief, Mibchvani advocated the following points that were important to the Svans. First, in his view, the Svans were the first settlers of the east Black Sea region. Second, they built the earliest state there. Third, the Abkhazians were descendants of the Adyge-Circassian tribes who arrived there only in the first centuries A.D.

The Abkhazian scholars were developing the opposite view. To their way of thinking, the Kerketai, Heniokhoi, Achaeans, Mossynoeci/Misimianoi, and Sanigai, i.e. the inhabitants of the seashore and the hilly flanks of the east Black Sea region, were the “direct ancestors of the Abkhazian people”, not the Svans (Anchabadze 1956: 262-265, 268, 1959: 13-16, 1964: 136-137, 169-179; 1976: 30-39, 44-45; Inal-Ipa 1965: 79, 86-90, 93-95, 1976: 176-189, 226-238; Dzidzaria 1960: 36-38, 1961: 15; Gunba 1989a: 139-157). The Abkhazians were especially attracted to the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, and they insisted that the appearance of these tribes, obvious Abkhazian ancestors, on the map of early Colchis was by no means the result of any migration out of the mountains. Rather, it was the result of the growth of knowledge of local ethnic patterns on the part of those late classical authors (Pliny the Elder, Arrian) who visited the region themselves and were much more familiar with the local environment than their predecessors had been (Anchabadze 1956: 12; Inal-Ipa 1976: 204-219)⁷⁸. From this point of view, the Abkhazian ancestors lived in the east Black Sea region from time immemorial, in contrast with the Georgian population. That is why Abkhazian authors emphatically objected the theory of “dual aboriginality”, especially because, in their view, it had political

connotations (for example, see Obrashchenie 1989; Gunba 1989b; Papaskiri 1990; Inal-Ipa 1992: 12; Ashkharua 1993).

The Abkhazian interpretation of the Colchian Kingdom was also different from the Georgian one. The Abkhazian authors viewed it as an unstable political formation consisting of various ethnic groups, including the west Georgians and the Abkhazians, rather than as a homogeneous centralized state (Inal-Ipa 1965: 68, note 1, 90-91; Anchabadze 1964: 156-160, 1976: 27-28; Dzidzaria 1960: 24; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 25-26). This was how they explained numerous local variants within the Colchis culture. Anchabadze and Inal-Ipa shared the idea of the Colchis Kingdom and considered it a real political formation. They agreed with Georgian authors that it had formed on a local foundation, and referred to archaeological evidence of obvious social differentiation there. In their view, the latter demonstrated that social classes had already formed in Colchis in the 1st Millennium B.C. (Anchabadze 1964: 142-143, 1976: 27; Inal-Ipa 1965: 91, 107; Dzidzaria 1961: 14-15). Yet, Inal-Ipa avoided exaggerating the role of the Kingdom and recognized the great impact of the Greeks upon the local residents. He acknowledged the important political and cultural role of the Greek cities (Dioscurias, Pityus, Gyenos) in Abkhazian territory, which affected local development positively. He emphasized that the Greeks had brought literacy to the east Black Sea region (Inal-Ipa 1965: 108-118, 1976: 190-193).

At the same time, he did his best to find arguments in favor of a close association between the Colchis Kingdom and the Abkhazians. He recognized that there were still no good grounds for a resolution of the "colchidki" issue. Were they minted by the local rulers or by the Greek cities? Yet, he believed that the representation of a bull's head on the coins could be somehow linked with the early Abkhazian bull cult (Inal-Ipa 1965: 107, 1976: 201). Anchabadze was even more convinced that the coins were minted by local authorities (Anchabadze 1964: 144. Also see Dzidzaria 1961: 15). While analyzing the relationships between the Colchis Kingdom and the Greeks, Anchabadze shared the Georgian approach and maintained that local state power restricted Greek colonization (Anchabadze 1964: 147-148, 160-161; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 24). Yet, he recognized a cultural interaction beneficial to both sides and in particular resulting in some Hellenization of the local population (Anchabadze 1976: 27, 40-41; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 34). Anyway, whereas the Georgians treated the Colchis Kingdom as a Georgian entity, the Abkhazians cast doubts on that. They were eager to find an Abkhazian ethnic element there. For example, while analyzing the Colchian issue, Anchabadze pointed out that the early authors frequently used this term as an inclusive one which covered not only the Mingrelian-Chans but other non-related tribes living in Colchis as well (Anchabadze 1964: 132-134, 1976: 29-30; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 25). In the same way, Inal-Ipa made every effort to prove that one should not identify the Colchians with the Georgian element alone, and that many features of the Colchian heritage could only be understood properly with reference to Abkhazian traditional culture (Inal-Ipa 1976: 200-203).

Abkhazian-Georgian competition expressed itself in the approach to the problem of early Christianity in Georgia. According to the historical evidence at hand, Christianity had arrived in Georgia and Abkhazia quite simultaneously in the 4th century, albeit along different routes. The Georgian authors emphasized the activities of St. Nino, who had arrived in Mtskheta from Cappadocia along the Kura River Valley. She had affected the Kartli king so strongly that he introduced Christianity as the state religion in his Kingdom. The Georgian Church considers St. Nino their first "national saint" (Berdzenishvili et al. 1950: 91, 1962: 85; Amiranashvili 1963: 90; Beridze 1974: 4-5; Tukhashvili 1989. Also see Igumen Vladimir, *Vigilianskii* 1992; Braund 1994: 246-252). While emphasizing that point, the Georgian approach either played down or ignored the role of Abkhazia in the introduction of Christianity in Transcaucasia. For example, the fundamental works on the history of art and architecture in Georgia either bypassed early medieval Abkhazia or mentioned its early Christian churches only in passing (for example, see Amiranashvili 1963: 113-114; Beridze 1967: 14, 43-44, 1974; Dzhamburidze, Tsitsishvili 1976: 41-42). At the same time, Georgian authors never failed to mention the Besleti Bridge of the 11th – 12th centuries, situated close to Sukhumi, where a medieval Georgian inscription was discovered in 1934 (Beridze 1967: 19, 59; Dzhamburidze, Tsitsishvili 1976: 84. For this discovery, see Bgaghba 1967: 20; Pachulia 1968: 27).

Meanwhile, Christianity was already present in the Abasgoi territory in the 4th century. It had arrived from Byzantium, and Pityus became one of the major centers of Christianity in the Caucasus. Although Christianity received state status among the Abasgoi only in the 6th century, as in the neighboring Lazica, Christian churches, including one of the earliest in the Caucasus, were already built in their territory by the 4th – 5th centuries. In particular, Abkhazian authors used to emphasize that in Pityus archaeologists had excavated the remains of the only large three-apsed church in Georgia, dated to the 5th century. They reported that a church intended for the Abkhazians had been built there in A.D. 551, and that the residence of the "Abkhazian" catholicos, whose ecclesiastic power was recognized throughout west Georgia, was situated there (Anchabadze 1959: 23-25, 1976: 41; Inal-Ipa 1965: 113-114, 124, 1976: 301; Dzidzaria 1960: 41, 44, 1961: 16).

Archaeology provided much new interesting and important data on early Christianity in Abkhazia. In particular, marvelous mosaics had been discovered at the church of the 4th – 5th century in Pityus, and Inal-Ipa attempted to relate some of their representations to Abkhazian folk beliefs (Inal-Ipa 1976: 299-300). The archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da that were identified with the Apsilae capital were of great importance in the discussion of the introduction of Christianity to the Abkhazian hinterland. It was established that the majority of the local population was already Christian in the 5th century. That is why, whereas initially Anchabadze considered that the Abkhazian population of early medieval times still held pre-Christian beliefs, he later pointed out that Christianity was already playing a big role there in the 4th – 5th centuries A.D. (Anchabadze 1976: 41-42). With other

Abkhazian authors, he pointed to the extensive church building activity in Abkhazia in the late 1st Millennium A.D. (Anchabadze 1959: 152-153; Pachulia 1968: 8-9; 1976: 120; Gunba 1989a: 91-95).

The Abkhazian view of the early history of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians presented to the general public was placed in tourist booklets, brochures and popular books that were widely published. Many of them were written by V. P. Pachulia, a "scholar in the field of tourism", as he was called by the well-known Soviet historian M. A. Korostovtsev. In his books Pachulia, who had once begun a career in archaeology, argued that Abkhazia was the homeland of the Abkhazians (Pachulia 1968; 1976). The same idea was put forth in a jubilee publication devoted to the 40th anniversary of Soviet power in Abkhazia (Dzidzaria 1961) and in school textbooks in the history of Abkhazia (Dzidzaria 1960; Anchabadze et al. 1986), although all this sort of publication emphasized the "deep and indissoluble" cultural and historical bonds between the Abkhazian and Georgian peoples.

At the same time, the Abkhazian problem was so hot that studies in the field of the history of Abkhazia were under strict control by the local authorities late in the Soviet era. All this kind of work was censored. Only people loyal to the authorities were encouraged to carry on these studies, and historical concepts that deviated from the officially approved view were either denied publication or heavily criticized. This related most of all to those works that expressed overt ethnocentrism, Georgian or Abkhazian. For example, in order not to make the Abkhazians angry, the Georgian authorities prohibited a new edition of Ingoroqva's book, "Giorgi Merchule" and did their best to stop publication of his followers' works (Lomouri 1990: 159). At the same time, those chapters in the first Abkhazian textbook on history that discussed the hottest issues of the early medieval period, in particular the formation of the Abkhazian Kingdom, were written by the Georgian historian M. D. Lordkipanidze. In accordance with well-established Georgian tradition, she reproduced Dzhnashia's conception of the Abkhazian Kingdom and emphasized first, the dominance of the Georgian population there, and second, the gradual Georgianization of the Kingdom. That included its ecclesiastic subordination to the Kartli catholicos and the spread of the Georgian language and writing system. Although she acknowledged that the Abkhazians played an active political role, not only in the Abkhazian Kingdom, but also in united Georgia later on, she still insisted that the Abkhazian Kingdom was a "Georgian political formation". Moreover, she "revealed" the "aspiration of the Abkhazian feudal society to join in the higher Georgian feudal life-style" (Dzidzaria 1960: 48-63, 64-71). In contrast to this flat conclusion, an Abkhazian author in the same textbook demonstrated that the Abkhazian nobility was dissatisfied with their subordinate position in united Georgia and revolted from time to time (Dzidzaria 1960: 75-78). Yet, the next textbook on Abkhazian history that was published in 1986 was based on the same pro-Georgian approach to the Abkhazian Kingdom and its policy (Anchabadze et al. 1986: 45-49). Apparently, the authors were pressed by Party officials, as the Decree of the CC CPG of April 25, 1978, demanded that the

manuscript of the textbook must be discussed at the Bureau of the CC CPG (Marykhuba 1994a: 284).

This made the Abkhazians angry, and they tried to complain to higher Party and Soviet authorities. In their letter to the Presidium of the XIX All-Union Party Conference, in 1988, they gave the following description of current historiography (Prilozhenie 1989; Marykhuba 1994a: 383-439). They pointed to the speech of the secretary of ideology of the CC CPG, G. N. Yenukidze, at the All-Union Meeting of Ideological Activists, held in Moscow on October 16-17, 1979. While discussing M. A. Suslov's speech, "On the further improvement of ideological, political education", Yenukidze complained that the central Publishing Houses of the country published books in local history without any consultation with the local historians in the respective republics. He claimed that poor quality publications were the result, which ignored the already established (i.e. created by Georgian scholars. V. Sh.) scholarly works and concepts. He was obviously displeased with the discussion of hot historical issues. Yenukidze talked of "bourgeois nationalist propaganda" and called on the relevant authorities to demonstrate its harm and to explain openly "whom those studies served" (Yenukidze 1979)⁷⁹). The Abkhazians perceived this talk as a clear attempt to introduce control over all academic studies carried out outside Georgian academic institutions, and to establish a Georgian monopoly in the field of the history of the Caucasian peoples.

What was Yenukidze's talk aiming at? The new ideological campaign that was launched in Georgia was caused, in particular, by the publication of a book by the Russian archaeologist, Yury N. Voronov, who lived and worked in Abkhazia. The book, entitled, "In the world of the architectural monuments of Abkhazia", was published in Moscow in 1978 by the Iskusstvo Publishing House. It led to a storm of indignation among Georgian scholars (for that see Marykhuba 1994b: 42). One of the leading specialists in the history of Georgian architecture, an Academician of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, V. V. Beridze, immediately wrote a highly critical review of it. This review targeted the "falsifications of the history of Georgia and Abkhazia", but it was not published at that time (Lomouri 1990: 160).

While acknowledging that Voronov was very familiar with the historical materials, Beridze considered it important to make some corrections and to point to errors from which, in his view, the book was suffering. In fact, the problem was that Voronov treated the Georgian version of medieval history without the required respect, and was one of the authors Yenukidze had warned against (Voronov 1989c). In Beridze's view, the author should have pointed out that the Abkhazian Kingdom included western Georgia and, thus, a large Georgian population from the very beginning. In addition, he omitted that this "west Georgian Kingdom" was an initiator of the struggle for the establishment of an all-Georgian national (sic! V. Sh.) state and that Georgian was the basis of the literary culture there. (Naturally, Beridze failed to mention that Greek was actually the literary language in the Abkhazian Kingdom in an earlier period! V. Sh.). Beridze maintained that even at the time of Byzantine rule, the local architecture was more related to Georgia than

to Byzantium. As a result, Beridze made heavy accusations against Voronov, as though the latter had distorted the history of the Abkhazian-Georgian relationships, and called his book “tendentious and incompetent” (Beridze 1989. Also see Chabukiani 1995: 28). It is worth noting that, although this review was not officially published in the very late 1970s, typed copies were extensively disseminated and, apparently, affected public opinion in Georgia.

By that time, Yury N. Voronov (1941-1995) had already proved to be one of the best archaeologists in Abkhazia. He was born to a Russian family in the village of Tsebel'da, and his family had been connected with Abkhazia for several generations. It is sufficient to note that his grandfather served as mayor of Sukhumi and contributed heavily to its flourishing in the pre-revolutionary period. In 1966, Voronov graduated from the Oriental Faculty of Leningrad State University and, in 1971, defended his Candidate in History thesis on the “History of Abkhazia from the earliest times up to the early medieval period”. He took part in many archaeological projects in Abkhazia, but was especially interested in the classical period, and was involved in the ongoing and highly productive archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da. He defended his Doctor of History thesis in 1986. It relied heavily on the results of his excavations and was entitled the “East Black Sea region in the Early Iron Age”. In the meantime, his academic career was not without problems, due to the aforementioned Georgian scholars' attitudes and the policies of the Georgian authorities. In 1978, he was the target of severe criticism at a meeting of the Department of Archaeology of the ARIHLL, because of his ignorance of the impact of the Georgian architectural tradition upon Abkhazia. At the time of turmoil in Tbilisi in 1978-1979, his book was ritually burnt on the Rustaveli prospect and the Georgian Academy of Sciences labeled his book “black”. From then on, his academic studies were permanently hampered, both by the local authorities and by Georgian scholars (Voronov 1989c). Moreover, this internal Georgian policy was approved by the leading Soviet ideologist, M. Suslov (for that, see Lakoba 1998b: 99).

Another paper that was written in 1978 and denied publication by Soviet censors is of no less interest. The paper was completed by a Georgian specialist in the historical geography of Georgia, the future corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, D. Muskhelishvili, in response to the demands of certain Abkhazian intellectuals for transfer of Abkhazia out of the Georgian SSR. The author was indignant about this claim and attempted to respond both as an historian and as a Georgian patriot – yet, patriotic pathos obviously outweighed a thorough professional approach (Muskhelishvili 1989).

While depicting the long and complicated process of shaping the territory of the Georgian state, on the one hand he recognized that “related and unrelated tribes and peoples” took part in it. On the other hand, violating his own logic, he claimed that “the development of the national territory was in fact the result of the activities of a distinct people” and naturally they were the Georgian people! The author rested on an organic primordialist theory of the origin of the state and maintained that the

formation of the Georgian territory was by no means the result of accidental political processes. Instead, Georgia was a “natural organic unit that had formed on a groundwork of physico-geographical and economic-geographical unity”. Moreover, he claimed that, in the course of state formation, “at a certain stage a tribe or people who lived under a more favorable natural environment or were better adapted to their environment appropriated an advantageous position”, and further development took place under the “hegemony of that tribe or people”. The author did his best to prove that progress in western Georgian development was the result of the permanent infiltration of east Georgian tribes who brought there the fruits of a higher civilization.

Thus, Muskhelishvili connected the emergence of the state and its development with the favorable influence of a Georgian agent⁸⁰). He connected its weakening and the re-shaping of its boundaries with changes in ethnic composition in some of its regions. All of this was the result of the “domination of Caucasian highlanders” or the “aggressive policies” of the Abkhazian rulers. In other words, accidental factors broke up the harmony of the “organic theory” that the author admired so much. The arrival of the Abkhazians in the territory of Abkhazia was viewed as later highlander intrusion during the period of decline of the Georgian state. The author argued that these newcomers mixed with the local inhabitants. That was why, he said, Abkhazia was always a part of Georgia, and its whole population was of a mixed “Abkhazian-Georgian” nature. Although the name Ingoroqva was not mentioned, his spirit obviously inspired all this reasoning, colored not so much by a historical as by a geopolitical and to some extent even a racial style of thinking⁸¹).

Unfortunately, this style of thinking dominated Georgian historiography in the post-Stalin era. It was also the basis of school education. The Georgian authorities did their best to prevent open discussions of those scholarly views that contradicted the Georgian orthodox concept of the past, and the historical field was under strict control. That control was introduced in Georgia especially after the turmoil of 1978⁸²). From that time forward, the publication of historical concepts that contradicted the main points of Georgian historiography was blocked in Georgia. It is no accident that, as we know, the history of the formation of the Abkhazian Kingdom and evaluation of its distinct features and policies were persistently represented according to Dzhnashia’s view; no deviations from it were permitted. Moreover, Georgian authors sometimes played down cultural development in Abkhazia or neglected it altogether. For example, in a special booklet on the development of archaeology within the territory of the Georgian SSR, one of the leading Georgian archaeologists, O. D. Lordkipanidze, mentioned archaeological research in Abkhazia only in passing. While emphasizing the importance of the early Georgian monuments, that author failed to mention those that were considered part of the “early Abkhazian heritage” by Abkhazian authors (Lordkipanidze 1982). Naturally, the Abkhazians were quite dissatisfied with that (for example, see Otyrba 1994: 282).

True, the Georgian authorities tried to attain some balance, on the basis of the

Decree of the CC CPG of April 25, 1978, which demanded that the “departments of propaganda and agitation, and the science and educational institutions of the CC CPG strengthen their control over publications focused on the history of Georgia and Abkhazia” (Marykhuba 1994a: 284). That is why the most offensive versions of history presented by Georgian authors were not published either. Take for example, the eighth volume of the collected works of the Academician N. Berdzenishvili. When initially published, it was entitled “Issues in Georgian History” and it contained ideas about the Abkhazian people’s origins very close to those of Ingoroqva. Due to Abkhazian pressure, these ideas were withdrawn from the first edition that had come out in the very late 1960s. The eighth volume was not published until 1990 (for that, see Lomouri 1990: 159; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 144, note 113). As has been already mentioned, a new edition of Ingoroqva’s works was delayed for the same reason. Ideas that might make the Abkhazians angry were regularly withdrawn from the publications of Georgian historians. They did not publish Georgian reviews of Abkhazian publications if the reviewers emphasized that the latter played down the role of Georgian culture and history (Lomouri 1990: 159-160). Yet, the greatest ideological pressure was aimed at the Abkhazian rather than the Georgian historical school. It is worth noting that, at the meeting of the Abkhazian Branch of the CPG held in Sukhumi on October 2, 1978, the initiators of the turmoil were identified as Abkhazians⁸³).

That is why for their part, Abkhazian authors complained that in the early 1980s, the publication of several books by Abkhazian historians and philologists was delayed or even cancelled. In particular, they pointed to the elimination of all the printed copies of G. Z. Shakirbai’s book, entitled “Abkhazian Place Names of Greater Sochi” (Sukhumi 1978) in which the author discussed Abkhazian settlement in the territory of contemporary Krasnodar Province of the Russian Federation during the medieval period. Obviously, certain officials treated the book as potentially dangerous because it might be used by the Abkhazians for claims to the northern territories.

A book on Abkhazian folklore by the Abkhazian philologist, S. L. Zukhba, spent years in the publishing house. It was published only after the author withdrew all criticism of Georgian historiography, having been pressed by the Abkhazian branch of the CPG. The aforementioned new textbook on Abkhazian history (Anchabadze et al. 1986) also spent five years in the publishing house. It came out only after its contents had been adjusted to meet the requirements of Georgian historiography. The publication of Inal-Ipa’s book, “Issues of the Ethnocultural History of the Abkhazians”, (Sukhumi 1976) caused a furious campaign in the local media, which treated the book as a harmful intrigue violating the friendship between the Georgian and the Abkhazian peoples (Za glubokoe nauchnoe izuchenie 1977)⁸⁴). The large scale of the scandal demanded the intervention of the Department of Science and Education Institutions of the CC CPSU, where they asked several leading Soviet scholars to evaluate the book. The specialists found nothing implausible there; rather, their review was quite favorable and positive.

At the same time, Inal-Ipa did not get a chance to respond to his critics in the media of the Republic. Those critics were the well-known Abkhazian scholars, Z. Anchabadze and G. Dzidzaria, who at that time headed historical studies in Abkhazia and for that reason had to keep their eyes on Tbilisi (Marykhuba 1994a: 262). Suffice it to note that in the 1970s they published a book about the everlasting friendship between the Georgian and the Abkhazian peoples, in which they mentioned the “Georgian policies of the Abkhazian Kings” and the hegemony of the Kartvelian element in the Abkhazian Kingdom (Anchabadze, Dzidzaria 1972). It is well known that there were numerous Georgian reviews attacking Inal-Ipa’s book (M. Lordkipanidze 1989; Lomouri 1990: 159). Yet, they were not published at that time; a Jesuitical decision was made that the Abkhazian author should be criticized only by Abkhazians – as if this made the organizers of the campaign invulnerable to reproaches of non-objectivity. Interestingly enough, the positive review of Inal-Ipa’s book written by the Moscow specialists was never published, due to a decision by the Georgian authorities. In July 1977, several Abkhazian historians sent letters to the Department of Science of the CC CPSU, to the First Secretary of the CC CPG, E. A. Shevardnadze, and to the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG, V. M. Khintba, in order to defend Inal-Ipa’s book (Marykhuba 1994a: 189-204). They never received a response.

The misadventures of the outstanding Abkhazian ethnographer were not over. By the end of the 1980s, he had completed a monograph about the Sadze, a distinct ethnic group that lived between Gagra and Sochi in the 19th century and spoke an Abkhazian-like language. Yet, its publication was delayed in Tbilisi; they disliked the author’s idea that an Abkhazian-speaking people had lived in that area in the past. Indeed, Georgian scholars used to identify the early medieval Sanigai, who lived in the northern Abkhazian borderlands, with the Mingrelians-Chans rather than with the Sadze (Lomouri 1990: 162-163). It took a lot of effort by the author to get his manuscript back from the Tbilisi Publishing House. I was told this story by Inal-Ipa himself (Shnirelman 1989a). In 1989, Georgian authors brought down upon him numerous accusations of charlatanism and incompetence (for example, see Lomouri 1990: 161-172)⁸⁵.

At the same time, dozens of books and articles were published in Georgia which were treated by the Abkhazians as not only neglecting their own past but attempting to appropriate, to “Georgianize” it. As early as the end of 1979, Abkhazian historians compiled a list of this sort of publications, including more than 30 titles. They listed among their authors such well-known Georgian historians as M. D. Lordkipanidze, S. G. Kaukhchishvili, S. S. Kakabadze, the economist P. V. Gugushvili, the historian of art I. Adamia and others. The Abkhazians were especially alarmed at their ignorance about the Abkhazian people, the claims to territorial rights and historical heritage that characterized certain popular books in the Georgian SSR, the ethnographic and historical maps published in Georgia and the school textbooks in history (Marykhuba 1994a: 206-218, 261-262). In particular, in a magnificent jubilee book about the Georgian SSR, published in

Moscow in 1967, the Abkhazians found themselves included in a list of the peoples for whom Georgia became a second homeland (Antadze et al. 1967: 82). This error was criticized even by the official Georgian newspaper, "Zaria Vostoka" (Sovetskii Soiuz, Gruziiia 1968). The Abkhazians could not help but greet such statements with open anger (Marykhuba 1994a: 211).

The Abkhazians were especially displeased with the jubilee encyclopedia, "The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic", published in 1981 on the 60th anniversary of the Georgian SSR (Abashidze 1981). Although both the Georgian and the Abkhazian views of the past were represented there, compiled by G. Melikishvili and M. Lordkipanidze from the Georgian side and Z. Anchabadze from the Abkhazian side, the Abkhazians perceived it as an openly anti-Abkhazian book that rested on the ideological pressure of Georgian historiography. They pointed to the obvious Georgiacentric nature of the encyclopedia and its neglect of the ethnic minorities living in Georgia. They revealed in the Georgian version of the past represented in the book vivid touches from Ingoroqva's views. They were also indignant about the historical maps included in the encyclopedia, where Abkhazia was represented as an early Georgian territory, the region of the early Georgian Kingdom's flourishing (Marykhuba 1994a: 363-373). In connection with this publication, they arranged a meeting of the ARIHLL staff with G. Ye. Yenukidze, who had publicly recognized that "there were certain people behind the historians whom the CC CPG was not able to deal with" (Marykhuba 1994a: 424).

Note that the Abkhazians also complained that the "Nauka" Publishing House refused to publish Turchaninov's new book in which the proto-Byblos and Phoenician writing systems, the earliest alphabets in fact, were called an Abkhazian invention (for that also, see Marykhuba 1994b: 39, note 9). As has been mentioned, the book was not published because all the reviews by specialists proved to be negative. In the meantime, Turchaninov's historical concept was appreciated by the Abkhazians, who did their best to free themselves of the pressure of Georgian historiography.

In the early 1980s, they did not publish the monograph by the Abkhazian archaeologist, M. M. Gunba, which was focused on early medieval Abkhazia. It came out only in 1989, when censorship pressures were released. What was the book about and why had it provoked a negative response from Georgian historians? In fact, Gunba was an ardent proponent of the Abkhazian view of the past and manifested it in a more radical way than his other Abkhazian counterparts. He very much objected to the Georgian belief that Georgian tribes alone occupied the Colchis seashore in the classical period. Instead, he argued that it was the Abkhazian ancestors who lived there in late classical times and even earlier, during the Colchis Kingdom period. He also came out against the identification of the Tsel'ba archaeological culture with the Georgians, that was held by certain Georgian authors.

While disputing Melikishvili's view, he attempted to demonstrate that the Abkhazian ancestors were by no means less advanced than the Georgians in the late

classical – early medieval period, and were able to form their own political bodies. By contrast to other Abkhazian historians, he mobilized a great deal of archaeological data to prove that. He put into doubt the idea that the early Abkhazian polities were dependent on Lazica, and he did his best to disprove this generally accepted conclusion. He also objected emphatically to the idea that Pityus and Sebastopolis (the former Dioscurias and the future Sukhumi) were Georgian (Laz) cities, as well as to the assumption of certain Georgian authors that the Abkhazians were baptized through Laz mediation. He did his best to disprove the Georgian view that the Abasgoi Principality was initially dependent on Lazica or even Kartli, and insisted that it was subordinated directly to Byzantium. He was naturally displeased with the Georgian tradition of calling the Abkhazian Kingdom the “Georgian Kingdom” and to identify its dominant majority with the Georgians. He maintained that the Kingdom was built by the Abkhazians, and protested against Georgian encroachment upon the Abkhazian historical heritage. While pointing to the long Greek presence in the east Black Sea region, he argued that the Greeks affected the Abkhazians much more effectively than the Georgians did; hence, the big difference between the social relationships among the Abkhazians, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other.

To put it differently, he used all available means to prove that the early medieval Abkhazian tribes did not concede to Georgian political entities such as Lazica in western Georgia or Kartli in eastern Georgia. His other idea was that the Abkhazians had never had a position of unity with the Georgians, and he referred extensively to both historical and archaeological evidence to confirm that. He pointed out that, although the Abkhazian Kingdom was a multi-ethnic state, it was ruled by the Abkhazians, who carried out their own Abkhazian policies rather than Georgian ones, as Georgian authors constantly claimed. Moreover, he did not overlook the long territorial dispute between the Abkhazians and the Georgians in the southern Abkhazian borderland (historical Samurzaqano), and argued that there were no Laz there in the distant past (Gunba 1989a).

Sometimes, his enthusiasm led him too far, and he leapt to implausible conclusions. For example, he attempted to push the baptism of Abasgia further into the past and argued that its king became a Christian at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. For no good reason, he maintained that Christianity was easily and rapidly introduced to the common people. Moreover, he picked up the Christian myth of the mission of St. Andrew and assumed that Abasgia and Apsilia were baptized by this ascetic. Thus, in his view, Abkhazia turned to be one of the earliest Christian countries in the world, or at least an earlier one than Georgia! Moreover, while daring to correct historical sources, Gunba made the first Abkhazian King not Leon II, as was well-established in historiography, but his predecessor, Leon I, whom Gunba represented as the ruler of a powerful state.

An Abkhazian archaeologist, I. I. Tsvinaria, went even further and intentionally opposed the prehistoric evolution in west Transcaucasia with that of east Transcaucasia (Tsvinaria 1990). He emphasized that cultural continuity from

Palaeolithic times was traced in the west, whereas certain important chronological periods (for example, the Neolithic) were lacking in the east. He considered that a sufficient basis to argue that the local inhabitants invented farming and animal husbandry quite independently in the western Caucasus. Tsvinaria maintained that local tribes played a major role in regional cultural development. True, he acknowledged that some newcomers might have arrived there from elsewhere from time to time, but they dissolved among the local inhabitants without a trace. Moreover, he put forward the hypothesis that the earliest food-producing economy would have been brought to Mesopotamia from the Caucasus⁸⁶). In particular, in contrast to what was well established by professional archaeologists, he assumed that it was not that the Maikop culture of the northwest Caucasus was greatly affected by cultural influences from the Near East but vice-versa: that the bearers of the Maikop culture affected the development of the Near East. He also derived the well-known Kura-Arax archaeological culture of the Early Bronze Age from the western Caucasus and strove to demonstrate that its bearers became ungrateful towards their “elder brothers”. “Having been pressed by the aggressive ethnic body of the Kura-Arax culture bearers, the west Caucasian culture... declined, and its bearers were assimilated and dissolved among the former” (Tsvinaria 1990: 19-20). Having said that, Tsvinaria represented the Abkhazians-Adyghes as the genuine indigenous people in the Caucasus. It was they who had built up the west Caucasian culture. The Kartvelians were represented as newcomers who had nothing to do with the early Caucasian world. It was they who were the bearers of the “aggressive Kura-Arax archaeological culture” (Tsvinaria 1990: 25-28). Although this assumption contradicted his own concept of the Kura-Arax culture’s roots in the west Caucasus, the archaeologist turned out to be a prophet. While discussing what happened 5,000 years ago, he was actually predicting the invasion of Georgian troops into Abkhazia in August 1992.

CHAPTER 9

FROM COMPETITION TO CONFRONTATION

Whereas the ethnocentric approach became more and more popular among Abkhazian scholars in the 1980s, it was no less characteristic of their Georgian counterparts. In the very late 1980s, Ingoroqvaesque ideas became widespread in Georgian publications, namely that the Georgian tribes made up both the indigenous and dominant population in the Abkhazian Kingdom, which should be called the “Georgian one”, and that this state carried out “Georgian policies”. Moreover, they maintained that it was less advanced, in contrast with the contemporary Georgian principalities, and that it inherited a lot of the Egrisi political legacy (Badridze 1988; Paichadze 1988). Naturally, the Abkhazians were irritated by all this sort of thing (Inal-Ipa, Amichba 1989).

It would be erroneous to believe that radical ethnocentric views about the past suddenly appeared only in the late 1980s. First, as we know, for a long time the Abkhazians and Georgians expressed very different views about what happened in the distant past and how it happened. Yet the Georgian view of history was an integral part of the official ideology of Georgia; it made up the core message of school textbooks and university courses, and was permanently imposed upon the general public by the media. In contrast, the creators of the Abkhazian view of the past met numerous obstacles, their manuscripts were frequently denied publication because they were considered “deviations from the scholarly truth”, i.e. from the Georgian view of history. It was also not easy to teach Abkhazian history at school. In this environment, many versions of the Abkhazian past lived only in oral history, and artificially constructed obstacles made them more and more radical. In time, those who shared the anti-Georgian stance enjoyed better chances of getting the position of secretary in ideology of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG (Marshania 1995: 197).

Second, the most radical approaches and statements on both sides had been hindered by censorship and unable to appear in the media in former times. This became obvious at the end of the 1980s, when letters, articles and reviews that had been completed but denied publication in previous years began to appear in Georgian newspapers. Muskhelishvili's aforementioned letter (Muskhelishvili 1989) and Beridze's review (Beridze 1989) were among those that demonstrated the attitudes of Georgian intellectuals a decade before. Beridze's review was published only in early April 1989. Slightly before that, an article by A. Bakradze, a deputy of

the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, had come out in a popular Georgian newspaper, in which the author recalled Voronov's book, and represented the Russian archaeologist as an instigator willing to undermine the traditional friendship between the Abkhazians and the Georgians (Bakradze 1989)⁸⁷). The two articles launched a furious campaign in the Georgian media against Yury Voronov. As a result, at the time of the first bloody clash between the Abkhazians and the Georgians on July 15-16, 1989, the "Yasochka" Memorial Museum was attacked and plundered. It was situated in the Abkhazian village of Tsebel'da and was devoted to Voronov's ancestors, who had made a valuable contribution to the cultural development of Abkhazia. Simultaneously, the site of the archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da, carried out by Voronov, was also vandalized (Voronov 1989a, 1989b).

This did not put a stop to the ideological campaign, and the Svan historian, T. Sh. Mibchvani, already known to us, accused Voronov of the falsification of Svan history, simply because the latter refused to identify the early medieval Sanigai with the ancestors of the contemporary Svans (Mibchvani 1989b)⁸⁸). From that time forward, Voronov was hunted. In order to find a place for himself in the rapidly changing political environment, on October 25, 1989 Voronov initiated the establishment of the Sukhumi Society of Internationalists. Yet, the harsh Abkhazian-Georgian confrontation left no room for his romantic idea of ethnic peace and harmony. Following his family's tradition, he had supported the Abkhazians and was appointed Vice-Premier in the government of the new Abkhazia. Simultaneously, he published a series of articles in the Abkhazian media which were intended for schoolteachers teaching the history of Abkhazia (for that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 43). When Sukhumi was attacked by Georgian troops in August 1992, Voronov's apartment was plundered and vandalized, and on September 11, 1995 Voronov himself was assassinated at the entrance of his home.

A sharp escalation of Abkhazian-Georgian conflicts took place during the course of 1988 – 1989, when passions formerly restricted to mild discussions in scholarly publications flooded numerous popular newspapers and journals (for that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 40-47). At that time an extensive report was compiled by Abkhazian intellectuals and sent to the XIX All-Union Communist Party Conference (June 1988), which was called the "Abkhazian letter" (Prilozhenie 1989; Marykhuba 1994a: 383-439). This appeal was approved by the Abkhazian public at a crowded meeting at the village of Lykhny on March 18, 1989. Soon after that, it was sent to the leaders of the USSR (the General Secretary of the CC CPSU and the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, M. S. Gorbachev, and the Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, N. I. Ryzhkov), the directorship of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the directors of the major research institutes (Obrashchenie 1989). The Abkhazians claimed that Abkhazia had to receive back the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic, which it had been granted in 1921. In the late 1980s, this demand was at the heart of numerous letters sent by Abkhazians to the CC CPSU (Perechen' 1989: 163). This

claim was discussed in an 87-page manuscript that focused on a detailed analysis of Abkhazian history as well as the contemporary social and political environment in Abkhazia.

In this report, Abkhazian intellectuals complained that they still had to protect their ethnocultural authenticity. They said they were alarmed about Abkhazia's chances for survival, and accused the Georgian authorities of a persistent intentional anti-Abkhazian policy. Their report commenced with a historical overview, and they claimed that the "Abkhazians were the earliest autochthonous inhabitants of the western Caucasus, who had lived there permanently since the 4th – 3rd Millennia B.C.". Indigenous status was so important to them that they were unwilling to share it with anybody else, and they emphatically protested against the idea of "two indigenous peoples", which had become very popular among Georgian writers by that time.

Besides, the Abkhazians maintained that, for centuries, Abkhazia had struggled to secure its political independence. They glorified the Abkhazian Kingdom, which reached its climax in the 8th – 10th centuries, when it annexed west Georgian lands. Later on, it took on the appearance of an "Abkhazian-Georgian" state, which was still called the Abkhazian Kingdom in medieval chronicles. They argued that after the Kingdom disintegrated, Abkhazia still secured its sovereignty until the Turkish conquest in the 16th century. The letter's authors insisted that Abkhazia had consciously joined the Russian Empire in 1810.

While unwilling to go deeper into the issue of the severe repressions by the Tsarist government of the Abkhazians in the 1860s – 1870s, and maintaining silence altogether concerning Russification, Abkhazian intellectuals directed their anger most of all against the policy of Georgianization, which was initially implemented by the Georgian Church, continued by the Georgian Socialists (Men'sheviks) in 1918-1921, and then elaborated by Lavrenty Beria. While extensively discussing the political history of Abkhazia during the Soviet era, the authors tried to demonstrate that, in contrast to many other republics and against its people's will, Abkhazia lost its initial political status during the first two Soviet decades. It was demoted from an independent republic to a treaty republic and, finally, to an autonomous republic within Georgia. They blamed Georgian nationalism for this, as if it had aimed at the destruction of Abkhazian self-awareness and worked toward the complete assimilation of the Abkhazian people. In order to achieve this goal, they said, Georgian authorities did their best to establish a monopoly of Georgian language and culture over Abkhazia, to impose upon the general public the idea that Abkhazia was an integral part of Georgia, to resettle a substantial Georgian population in the territory of Abkhazia, and at the same time, to eliminate Abkhazian intellectuals physically, to deprive the Abkhazians of their distinct past, and to restrict the sphere of the Abkhazian language. All of this they did under demagogic slogans about the everlasting friendship of the Georgian and the Abkhazian people!

The Abkhazian authors pointed out that, whereas this policy was recognized as

harmful, it kept being implemented over the following decades, until perestroika, albeit in a somewhat eased form. In particular, they paid a lot of attention to the idea that the population of the Gali region had suffered especially intense pressure from the officials. The authorities did advise people there to record themselves as “Georgians”, for that provided certain privileges to them in terms of education, jobs and careers. The authors of the letter also pointed to the political connotation of the hypothesis of the Iberian-Caucasian family of languages. If Abkhazian was viewed as being related to Georgian, then it was not difficult to transfer it to the category of a “dialect” and to introduce Georgian as the language of instruction at school, as had been done with the Mingrelian and Svan languages⁸⁹).

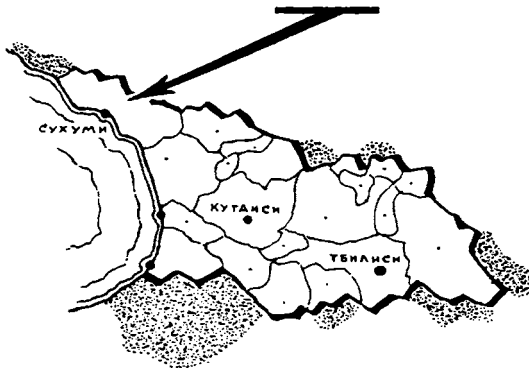
One of the major points that irritated the Abkhazians was the Georgiocentric approach to the history of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians that was manifested especially clearly by Ingoroqva. Abkhazian authors pointed out that, although it was condemned officially in the 1950s, this approach was shared by many Georgian scholars, who followed it in their historical perspectives, and included Abkhazia into Georgia, the homeland of the ethnic Georgians. In the Abkhazian view, recent Georgian studies of the history of Abkhazia in fact manifested the continuation of the struggle which was and is still being waged against the Abkhazian people, the struggle for “legal confirmation of the historical right of Georgia and the Georgian people to appropriate this country which is called Abkhazia”. Thus, for them, Georgian historiography was not common scholarship but an “elaborate geopolitical doctrine” aimed at the establishment of a “Greater Georgia” in the future (Marykhuba 1994a: 420-425).

It is worth noting that “Greater Georgia” was not an Abkhazian fantasy. At the Symposium of Rustaveli held in Turku, Finland, one could see a map of historical Georgia that included certain regions that made up parts of contemporary Turkey, Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since the fall of 1988, this map has proved to be very popular among Georgian politicians and intellectuals. It was extensively disseminated in Georgia, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia showed it to foreign journalists in the summer of 1989 (for example, see Hewitt 1996: 196, note 16). It is still popular in post-communist Georgia (map 21).

The Georgians paid a lot of attention to the “Abkhazian letter”, and it was severely criticized by the First secretary of the CC CPG, D. P. Patiashvili, at the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR (Patiashvili 1989: 2). After an order by the Georgian authorities, Georgian scholars including several Academicians and corresponding members of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, have compiled an extensive response (Po povodu 1989). While using skillfully the weakest points of their opponents (for example, their references to Turchaninov’s works), Georgian scholars made labored to prove the major ideas of Georgian historiography. That is, they defended the Colchis Kingdom and its “Georgian” inhabitants, the arrival of the Abkhazian ancestors in this territory only in the first centuries of the Christian era, the “west Georgian” character of the Abkhazian Kingdom, the domination of the Kartvelian population there, etc. They made

Р. ЧАБУКИАНИ

ПРЕЛЮДИЯ ТРАГЕДИИ АБХАЗИИ



Map 21 The title page of Chabukiani's book "Prelude to the Abkhazian tragedy" with a map of Greater Georgia

attempts to demonstrate that, even after the united Georgian state had collapsed in the 13th century, Abkhazia was still subordinated to certain Georgian kingdoms or principalities and had never achieved true independence. The Georgian response contained Ingoroqva's idea of the devastating invasion by the highlanders in the 17th century and the consequent crucial transformation of the ethnocultural environment of Abkhazia.

The Georgian authors did their best to deny any attempts to Georgianize the Abkhazians. They referred either to the sympathy of Georgian democrats, such as Iliа Chavchavadze, towards the Abkhazians, or to the class policy of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918-1921, as though it had lacked any ethnic flavor, or to the willingness of the Abkhazian authorities of the 1920s, as though they had demonstrated by themselves the aspiration to join Georgia. If Georgian authors did recognize anything fair in the Abkhazian letter, it was the anti-Abkhazian policy of 1937-1953. Yet, avoiding going deeper into that, they pointed out that the Georgians themselves suffered repressions in those days. They referred to the deportation of the Meskhetian Turks and the "Mingrelian affair". However, the Meskhetian Turks were deported because, being Muslims, they were not

considered true Georgians (For this reason they are still unable to come back to their homeland). The underlying cause of the “Mingrelian affair” was that L. Beria, then the head of the secret police (NKVD), had surrounded himself with Mingrelians, which provoked the suspicions of Stalin. Thus, the “Mingrelian affair” had nothing to do with Georgians proper.

Moreover, while manipulating national census data, which will be discussed in detail further on, Georgian authors attempted to downplay the number of Abkhazians. To achieve this end, they defined ethnicity through spoken language rather than self-identification. They went so far as to suggest that everyone with a Georgian-sounding last name should be considered Georgian. They worked hard to disprove Abkhazian accusations about the Georgian Church’s aspiration to Georgianize the Abkhazians. They demonstrated that it was rather the Russian Orthodox Church that implemented the policy of Russification. In the same way, they defended the policy of the Democratic Republic of Georgia towards the Abkhazians in 1918-1921. They tried to place on Dmitri Gulia responsibility for the introduction of Georgian as the language of instruction in the Abkhazian schools in the 1940s. Naturally, they failed to mention that he was pressed to develop a new Abkhazian alphabet on the basis of the Georgian script by being threatened with repression. While ignoring many of the fair critical remarks and demands of the Abkhazians, Georgian authors accused them of ingratitude towards “Lenin’s national policy” and unwillingness to consider the “achievements of Soviet power”. Moreover, they blamed the Abkhazians for the construction of the myth of “Greater Abkhazia”.

As we shall see further on, beginning with 1989, all these arguments established the basis for an extensive propaganda campaign waged for several years in the Georgian media. This campaign was aimed at achieving independence and securing territorial integrity. That is why it was very important for Georgian authors to argue that the Georgians proved to be an indigenous population throughout all Georgian territory. For them, this was an important argument against any non-Georgian national autonomy there, as though the Georgians had suffered discrimination from dominant minorities there. Indeed, the structure of national representation developed during the Soviet era was by no means perfect, but Georgian authors intentionally exaggerated the situation. They insisted that, in certain areas, the non-indigenous population had turned into a dominant majority, which, in their view, threatened the indigenous people, i.e. the Georgians (for example, see Gotsiridze 1989). The Georgians were especially alarmed by the aspiration of the ethnic minorities (Armenians, Azeris, Greeks and the like) to establish their own political autonomies, which was openly manifested during perestroika. The Georgians treated that as a threat to Georgian territorial integrity. To prevent the disintegration of the state, Georgian democrats believed it was reasonable to dissolve the former ethnic autonomies within the territory of Georgia. This was the core issue, which provoked hot discussions of the notion of “indigenous/non-indigenous” in 1989-1990 and caused the abolition of one of the

autonomies in very late 1990, the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. Needless to say, historical arguments played a major role in all those disputes.

One should acknowledge that both the Georgian and the Abkhazian arguments contained a grain of truth. Yet, it is also obvious that, in their aspiration to avoid addressing the hottest issues, Georgian authors ignored certain important facts, made doubtful interpretations of evidence, and shifted the emphasis. In any case, passions reached their climax by 1989. The Abkhazians were especially alarmed by the chauvinist propaganda launched by numerous informal Georgian movements and shared by many Georgian cultural activists. The latter's ideas were disseminated by the Georgian media, in particular, such newspapers popular among the intellectuals as "Literaturuli Sakartvelo" ("Literary Georgia"), "Narodnoe obrazovanie" ("Public education"), "Molodezh Gruzii" ("Georgian Youth") and the like. For example, in the fall of 1988, "Literaturuli Sakartvelo" published the slogan, "Georgia for the Georgians" for the first time, and appreciated such reasoning as "there should not be anything un-Georgian in Georgia" (cited from Obrashchenie 1989. Also see, Cheremin 1991; Goldenberg 1994: 95; Lakoba 2001a, 2001b)⁹⁰). In order to understand the message, one has to bear in mind that the Georgian expression for Georgia is "Sakartvelo" which means "the country of the Kartvelians", i.e. excludes the "Mingrelians" and "Svans", let alone the "Abkhazians" (Garakanidze 1959: 19; Hewitt 1995a: 303). Whereas for the Georgians, addressing the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was an important symbol of their struggle for sovereignty, the Abkhazians treated this as the restoration of the nationalist policy of the Men'sheviks, which discriminated against ethnic minorities. They were alarmed by the future of the Abkhazian autonomy especially as there were claims among the Georgian nationalists for the abolition of all autonomies. That is why the Abkhazians were frightened of the development of the Georgian democratic movement, and they attempted to break up democratic meetings in support of Georgian independence, as happened in Gagra on May 26, 1990 (for that, see V Abkhazskom obkome 1989; T. Shamba 1989; Lomsadze, Sinel'nikov 1990; Cheremin 1991; Lakoba 2001b).

While being aware of these Abkhazian attitudes, the Georgian democrats did their best to intensify propaganda about their ideas in Abkhazia and to involve the Abkhazians in joint actions against the "imperialist policies of Russia". Yet, the Abkhazians did not trust them; they were indignant at the many chauvinist slogans of the Georgian democrats, especially the latter's aspirations to associate their movement with the Democratic Republic of Georgia (for example, to use its black, white and claret colored banner, the portrait of its leader Noy Zhordania, etc.). The Abkhazians made many attempts to counteract them, and there were clashes between them and the Georgian democrats (Shnirelman 1989a)⁹¹).

In the meantime, in the spring of 1989, Georgian authorities manifested a special passion for the historical symbols of the Georgian nation, which were regarded very emotionally by many Georgians. On February 8, 1989, all Georgia (including South Ossetia!) had celebrated the 900-year anniversary of the David the

Builder's enthroning. The next day, the foundation of a monument to him was laid in the center of Tbilisi. On February 21, the newspaper, "Zaria Vostoka", published a draft of the "State program for the protection and usage of the monuments of Georgian history and culture", elaborated by order of the CC CPG. After that time, the newspaper began publishing photographs of the most important architectural monuments of medieval Georgia, accompanied by short descriptions of their significance. Finally, on April 24, 1990, the CC CPG, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and the Soviet of Ministers of the Georgian SSR passed a decree: "On the state program for scholarly studies, teaching and popularization of the history of Georgia". All of these demonstrated what a great importance the Georgian authorities attached to history as a significant symbol of both the Georgian state and nation.

Simultaneously, articles were published intensely focused on the formation of the Georgian nation and the history of the Georgian state. It is worth noting that, in this context, the nation was treated in a flat primordialist way. The later viewpoint was at the core of a book by the Georgian philosopher, N. Natadze, published by the Georgian Academy of Sciences, where the author identified a nation with an entity based on blood relationships rather on common territory, language and culture (for that, see Charachidze 1989: 13). While manifesting this sort of approach, the authors of various articles in the Georgian media were searching deep in prehistory for the roots of the "Georgian ethnos". In their representation, this ethnos was an everlasting one which, despite all enemies, developed towards closer integration and consolidation. The staff of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Georgian Academy of Sciences kept maintaining that, after Georgia was united in the 11th – 12th centuries, the term "Kartvelians" had enjoyed inclusive meaning and covered the Mingrelians, Svans and other groups, and that "Sakartvelo" became the name of the whole country. They argued that the united Georgian Kingdom embraced almost all of the Caucasus (Koranashvili 1989a; Tukhashvili 1989; Gvasalia 1991b). Yet, they failed to mention the role of the Abkhazians in the process of unification, and did not use the term "Abkhazia", either.

True, one of these authors, the philosopher G. Koranashvili, suddenly remembered that the Abkhazians had made an important contribution to the political unification of the country in the 9th – 10th centuries. He did his best to demonstrate that there had never been any tensions between the Abkhazians and the Georgians. He explained all the misfortunes of the Abkhazian people with reference to, first, the policy of Russification implemented by the Tzarist government, and second, the actions of the Georgian authorities during the Stalin era. He even recognized the distortions of history that were characteristic of certain Georgian authors, and Ingoroqva most of all. At the same time, he remarked that this competition was commenced by the Abkhazians themselves in the 1920s, and he referred to Ashkhatsava's and Basaria's publications, with which we are already familiar (Koranashvili 1989b). Thus, Koranashvili was one of only a few Georgian

authors who openly recognized the confrontation between the Georgian and the Abkhazian ethnocentric views of the past. Certain other Georgian authors went even further and accused the Abkhazian historians of “stirring up anti-Georgian hysteria” (Gamakhiria, Chania 1991b: 1).

Meanwhile, Koranashvili was immediately challenged by the historian K. Tskitishvili, who thoroughly reproduced Ingoroqva’s view of the Abkhazian people’s origins and called Ingoroqva the “great scholar” and the “last encyclopedist”. Moreover, whereas, in order to distance himself from Ingoroqva, Koranashvili had referred to such advocates of the idea of the “dual aboriginality” as Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia and Melikishvili, Tskitishvili based his views on the ideas of those who shared Ingoroqva’s approach, N. Berdzenishvili, Yu. Kocharava, Sh. Meskhia, M. Lordkipanidze, and Sh. Shanidze (Tskitishvili 1989). Thus, it turned out that Georgian historiography itself was by no means highly consolidated. Yet, the newspaper “Youth of Georgia”, that had arranged the discussion, proved to be most sympathetic to Tskitishvili and like-minded scholars. Indeed, he argued that Abkhazia was a permanent part of Georgia, that its borders extended to Tuapse, that the contemporary Abkhazians were descendants of Adyghe newcomers, and that there had been no need to reorganize the Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute into the Abkhazian State University in 1978.

This approach predominated in the Georgian mass media in 1989-1990. It appealed to history and, following Ingoroqva, represented the Abkhazians as recent newcomers in the “Georgian land” (Dzebisashvili 2000: 154). By that time, the Georgian public had already rehabilitated Ingoroqva, and the street where the Institute of Linguistics of the Georgian Academy of Sciences was situated was named after him (Hewitt 1995b: 59, 61, 1998: 120). On March 30, 1989, a corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, S. Tsaishvili, made a speech on Georgian radio. In it he said: “Unfortunately, those who promote these disuniting trends (he meant the growth of Georgian-Abkhazian tensions, V. Sh.) forget about our historical heritage, forget about how those Abkhazian tribes, who call themselves the Abkhazian tribe, arrived in Abkhazia. Yet, they might have had another name in the past. They forget how they moved here to the Black Sea seashore, how they were welcomed by the Georgian people, local Georgian people who lived in this territory, and made them their brothers and relatives... Instead of being familiar with their past, with this historical lesson, they began to demonstrate their hegemonistic claims to this very territory which is nowadays called Abkhazia ...” (cited from *Istoricheskaiia spravka* 1989). It is worth noting that this speech was given on the next day after Patiashvili’s speech at a session of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia. It is obvious that the campaign was arranged from the top levels of power.

The central Georgian media developed the same ideas. In May 1989, the newspaper “*Akhalgazdra komunisti*” (“Young Communist”) read: “While using our millennial kindness, with our polite permission, the Adyghe tribes (Apsilae and Abasgoi) arrived from the northern Caucasus about two centuries ago, and we

settled them in the heart of our Georgian land... The tribes who came as guests called themselves by the name of the earliest Georgian tribe, the Abasgoi, and, becoming impudent because of our simple-heartedness, they imposed the Adyghe language upon the Georgian Abkhazians who, for millennia, were unable to pronounce any sound in any other language but Georgian. Today, the newcomer from over the mountains who enveloped our national body like ivy claims our land” (Kakhidze et al. 1989)⁹².

Unfortunately, certain Georgian historians also took part in this anti-Abkhazian campaign, launched by the Georgian media. N. Pirtskhalava depicts the early 1990s as a period of “nationalist obscurantism” when many Georgian intellectuals emphasized a romantic image of the glorious past instead of analyzing contemporary processes (Pirtskhalava 1997: 189-192). For example, Professor N. Yu. Lomouri put forward his own view of the ethnogenetic development at the Black Sea region of Georgia. He assumed that the ancestors of both the Georgians and the “Circassian-Adyghes” lived there in classical and early medieval times, and that the Abkhazians proper arrived there much later. He believed that the latter were to a major extent linked to the flow of the highlanders’ population in the 16th – 17th centuries (Lomouri 1989)⁹³. True, while responding to critical remarks by Inal-Ipa, he recognized that the term “Circassian-Adyghes” was an unsuitable one, and replaced it with the more appropriate term, the “Abkhazian-Adyghes”. At the same time, despite declaring his disassociation from Ingoroqva’s concepts, that did not affect his reasoning that the Apsilae and the Abasgoi were included in the “Georgian ethnic entity”. It did not keep him from saying that according to physical anthropological data, they were close to the Georgians and differed from the contemporary Adyghes, or that the Abkhazian language was brought to Abkhazia by the highlanders in the 16th – 17th centuries (Lomouri 1990: 161, 169-171). To put it differently, he offered Ingoroqva’s own schema, slightly revised. This schema was also picked up by certain Georgian archaeologists (for example, see Akhalkatsi 1990) who attempted to introduce the highly politicized term, the “Apswas”, insulting to the Abkhazians (for that, see Inal-Ipa 1989b: 4) into the scholarship.

While pointing to the ethnocentric approach in the interpretation of early history that was characteristic of Abkhazian historiography, the Georgian historians themselves also proved unable to avoid ethnocentrism, and when they criticized the Abkhazians, they demonstrated the same methodological errors. For example, Professor Lomouri remarked that the idea of an extensive Abkhazian-Adyghe settlement in the Black Sea region in the distant past was but a linguistic hypothesis and could not serve as the basis for any strong conclusions. At the same time, he himself rested on no less hypothetical idea, that of the early settlement of the Svan and Mingrelian-Chan tribes there. Moreover, proceeding from contemporary reality, he considered them to be Kartvelians (Lomouri 1990: 163-166), although in the strict ethnic sense the term “Kartvelians” was reserved for the population of eastern Georgia alone. Yet, this inclusive usage of the term let him and other Georgian authors argue that the Kartvelians had lived on the east Black Sea coast from time

immemorial, and, naturally, this provoked only a negative response from the Abkhazians. Besides, Lomouri used archaeological data incorrectly. He viewed the dolmen culture of Abkhazia as a variant of the Colchian culture, which was inaccurate. However, this approach towards the archaeological picture was very important to him, for he identified the Colchis culture with the Georgian ethnos, and this let him maintain demographic and cultural Georgian domination in Colchis in the Early Iron Age. He did not stop at that. As he said, the inclusive term “Colchians” embraced the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, as well as many others. Indeed, in his view, they were also the bearers of an all-Georgian cultural heritage (Lomouri 1990: 161, 167-69). There was no space for the authentic Abkhazian culture in this schema. The Abkhazians could not submit to that.

Other arguments were picked up by the Georgian media as well. Thus, P. Topuria convinced his readers that it was beneficial for Abkhazia to stay within Georgia. Indeed, he reasoned, the Abkhazian ethnos was less socially advanced and unready for state life. He warned the Abkhazians in a “friendly” way that, if they broke away from Georgia, they would “move along the wrong route of ethnic development” (Topuria 1989).

All of this was an almost literal reproduction of the historical approach that in 1989 formed the very bedrock of the basic political documents of the Georgian radicals. One of their leaders was Zviad K. Gamsakhurdia, a former human rights activist and an active member of the Georgian Helsinki group, a well-known writer and lecturer at Tbilisi State University, and the future first president of independent Georgia. In the very late 1980s, Gamsakhurdia’s name became the symbol of those who struggled for the independence of Georgia (Jones 1994: 135-136; Goldenberg 1994: 82, 90). All his words were listened to, and people were ready to follow him. He fascinated even officials of the CC CPG. In the meantime, in order to confirm his geopolitical ambitions, Gamsakhurdia referred to Ingoroqva’s ideas.

In 1989, in his well-known open letter to the Academician Andrei D. Sakharov, he maintained first, that “Abkhazia was... part of Colchis, one of the earliest Georgian states” in the 1st Millennium B.C. Second, the name “Abkhazia” often stood for Georgia in medieval times. Third, “in the New Time (this term was commonly applied to the 17th – 19th centuries in the Soviet historical tradition. V. Sh.) they began to use the term “Abkhazians”, albeit incorrectly, to stand for the North Caucasian, Adygheian tribe of Apswa, related to the Circassians, who began to conquer the northern mountainous part of historical Abkhazia, assimilated its Georgian population and became firmly established there”. Gamsakhurdia had coined the name “Apswas” for the contemporary Abkhazians and compared them with the “Arabs who settled in the historical lands of Egypt and Israel”. Finally, he treated national autonomies as an “obvious spot for Stalinist crimes against the peoples of the USSR” and believed that they had been established in order to stir up inter-ethnic hostility (Gamsakhurdia 1989; Akhalkatsi, Alashvili 1991). A collection of papers presented in the same style was published in 1989 by the magazine, “Matiane”, issued by the Georgian Helsinki group, headed by Z. Gamsakhurdia (for

that, see Otyrba 1994: 308-309, note 4). Another member of the Helsinki group, M. Gagnidze, following Gamsakhurdia, argued that ethnic minority rights had never been encroached upon in Georgia. Rather, Georgians' rights had been damaged in Abkhazia (Gagnidze 1991).

All of this was meant to serve as instruction for political actions. In his special appeal "Letopis'-4" (1989), Gamsakhurdia called on the "Georgians of northwest Georgia" to use all means in the struggle against the "Apswa separatists". To begin with, he suggested, "one had to annex those areas of the Abkhazian ASSR which did not belong to Apsny in historical terms, and where the Apswa people accounted for lesser numbers, namely, the Gali, Gul'ripsh, Gagra, and Sukhumi regions, part of the Ochamchira region, as well as Sukhumi itself". While concluding his appeal to the Georgians of "northwest Georgia" (he deliberately used this term for Abkhazia. V. Sh.), he wrote with indignation: "The fact that 16 percent of the population sat at the head of 84 percent, caused all those illegal actions that one can observe in the Abkhazian ASSR" (Istoricheskaiia spravka 1989). Yet, he distorted both the numbers and their meaning. First, the Abkhazians accounted for 17.8 percent of the population of Abkhazia at that time. Second, Russians, Armenians, Greeks and other non-Georgians accounted for more than half of the rest of the population, who hardly shared Gamsakhurdia's ideas. Moreover, there were many Georgians in Abkhazia who supported the Abkhazians! It is also worth noting that Gamsakhurdia was excited by Beria's policy: "In 1936 – 1954, the domination of the separatists and Apswa violence against other nations living in the Abkhazian ASSR was stopped. Yet, in the year after Stalin's death the separatists did their best to take revenge and restore the situation that obtained in Lakoba's time" (Istoricheskaiia spravka 1989).

Gamsakhurdia's calls found their admirers. At a meeting in Sukhumi, the leader of the All-Georgian Shota Rustaveli Society, Akaki Bakradze, convinced the Mingrelians that they were the direct descendants of the early Abkhazians, who once lived on the Black Sea coast (Hewitt 1993: 283). While giving a talk at the Plenum of the CC CPG on September 19, 1989, the First Secretary of the CC CPG, G. G. Gumbaridze, vigorously reproduced the rhetoric of the Georgian radicals about domination of the Abkhazians in the power structures of Abkhazia (for that, see Lakoba 1990b. Also see Shakryl 1989; Adzhindzhal 1989). Even Gamsakhurdia's consistent opponent, the leader of the National-Democratic Party of Georgia, Giia Chanturia, believed that the Abkhazians had arrived in Abkhazia in the 18th century (Chanturia 1989).

True, after he was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and then President of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia radically revised his attitude toward the Abkhazians. He demonstrated that for the first time in March 1991. At that time, on March 17, an All-Union referendum on the future of the USSR was held. Gamsakhurdia declared that a referendum on Georgian independence would be arranged on March 31, instead. In order to achieve success he sought for the support of ethnic minorities, and was ready to promise them a lot for it. While attempting to prevent the

Abkhazians from participation in the All-Union referendum, he emphasized the “common Colchian origin” and the “genetic relationships” between the Abkhazians and Georgians, as well as their common history and culture. Demonstrating Caucasian courtliness, he recognized the great prestige of the Abkhazian image among the Georgians and talked of the chivalrously gracious behavior of the Abkhazians. He was now inclined to view them as an “indigenous population”, albeit in the context of the concept of “dual aboriginality”. After that time, he placed the blame for the turmoil in Abkhazia on the “imperialist policies of Russia” and the “adventurism” of Abkhazian official leaders, headed by Ardzinba (Gamsakhurdia 1991a). The wave of anti-Abkhazian propaganda in the Georgian media eased⁹⁴). Yet, this was obviously related not so much to a radical change of policy on the “Abkhazian issue” as to that fact that the “Ossetian issue” had become of major importance by that time, and the Georgian media were ordered to launch an anti-Ossetian campaign. At the same time, while taking part in the presidential elections, Gamsakhurdia included in his political program a promise to secure the status of the Abkhazian autonomous republic within Georgia (Gamsakhurdia 1991b: 2) and confirmed this intention in his speeches (for example, see Gamsakhurdia 1991c). Concerning the Abkhazian claims for the separation of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia was ready to acknowledge their right to self-determination, albeit ... on the other side of the Great Caucasian ridge (Nodia 1998: 27-28).

In the meantime, the former attitude of the Georgian authorities towards the Abkhazians as a “non-indigenous” population was not forgotten. It revived after the fall of Gamsakhurdia’s regime. For example, in his talk at the U.K. Parliament in London on November 23, 1992, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, A. Chikvaidze, referred to the Argonaut myth and maintained that only Georgians lived in Colchis at that time (Hewitt 1993: 312). All of this was intended to substantiate Georgian rights to Abkhazian territory.

Another Georgian politician also shared the Georgian radical view of Colchis history. He was T. V. Nadareishvili, a former KGB officer and the Second Secretary of the Gagra local Branch of the CPG. In the post-Soviet era, he was a member of the Georgian Cabinet of Ministers, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia between December 1991 and August 1992, then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia in exile, and simultaneously a major-general of the Georgian troops. He was an active participant in the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992 – 1993, during which time he acted as Chairman of the Georgian Soviet for the Defense of Abkhazia. In his book focused on the “genocide in Abkhazia” he argued the blood relationships between the Georgians and the Abkhazians, and accused the “Abkhazian separatists” of ignorance of this simple “historical truth”, as though this had caused them to commit “crimes against humanity”. He also accused Abkhazian scholars of falsifying the history of the Abkhazian people, in order to “artificially isolate the Abkhazians from the unified Georgian organism”. He maintained that, “if the Abkhazians knew their genuine history, they would never attack the Georgians, and would be Georgian patriots, instead”. Nadareishvili

himself thoroughly adhered to Ingoroqva's ideas and argued that the first Abkhazians were Georgians and that, until the 17th century, only Georgian political formations flourished in the east Black Sea region, where Georgian speech was heard and the Georgian culture predominated. Yet, he complained, unfortunately the region became the target of mass migrations by the Adyghe-Circassian highlanders in the 17th century, when local inhabitants were partly assimilated, and this resulted in cultural decline and tremendous cultural changes. This was when Abkhazian alienation from the Georgians commenced (Nadareishvili 1996: 5-12).

Yet, Nadareishvili claimed, Abkhazia was always an integral part of Georgia, and there had never been any non-Georgian state there. That is why, he said, the Abkhazian monopoly on political power in Abkhazia was intolerable (Nadareishvili 1996: 32). His goal, he declared, was the "revival of Georgian genes and spirit" in Abkhazia. In fact, the approach, which was advocated by this contemporary Georgian politician, obviously demonstrated the chauvinist nature of Ingoroqva's concept and the fruits of its political use. Apparently, being implemented, this concept would turn the Abkhazians into a silent and discriminated-against minority in the land where their ancestors had lived for centuries.

Interesting to note, in contrast to many other Georgian authors, Nadareishvili was well aware of the ideological messages of various versions of the past. Apparently, his experience of serving at the KGB and in Communist Party structures helped him a lot with that. He understood fairly well that building a distinct view of their past on the part of an ethnic minority and especially teaching it at school, promotes the rapid growth of ethnic self-awareness and inspires a feeling of isolation from the dominant majority. The former resentment is also revived, and building an enemy image in the person of the dominant majority is facilitated (Nadareishvili 1996: 5-6, 33-34).

That is why both early and medieval history play major roles in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and are referred to extensively in the context of the ideological warfare waged by both sides. Many Georgian intellectuals take an active part in that; although far from the historical field, they consider it an important patriotic action to display their solidarity with the Georgian view of history. A booklet of this sort was published in Kutaisi, with the support of the governor of Imereti Province and the mayor of the city of Kutaisi, T. Shashiashvili. Its author, a Doctor of Technology, R. R. Chabukiani, was willing to "unmask Apswa (Abkhazian) separatism" and to prove the historical unity of the Georgians and the Abkhazians. He attached great importance to the fact that his booklet was published in Kutaisi, the "early Georgian-Abkhazian capital".

In this booklet, he wrote of the Iberian state as if Homer had already known it (? V. Sh.), and of a Pontic state that was a part of the "Hellenistic Georgian world" (? V. Sh.). Moreover, he recalled Turchaninov's "discoveries" and maintained that both the Maikop and the Sukhumi inscriptions were left by the Mingrelian and Svan ancestors, as though the latter were the builders of the early Colchis state (Chabukiani 1995: 5-6, 20). He opposed the medieval Abkhazians, i.e. the

descendants of the Apsilae and the Abasgoi, to the contemporary “Adyghe-Apswas” and argued that the former had always constituted a majority in Abkhazia, whereas the latter had arrived there only in the 16th century. He went so far as to claim that, in their own language, the Abkhazians (Apswas) were the Abazins rather than the Abkhazians”. Following Ingoroqva, M. Lordkipanidze and Mibchvani, he identified the medieval “Abkhazians” with the Georgians and maintained that the “Apswas” had appropriated the name “Abkhazians” after they resettled in the Georgian province of Abkhazeti. Moreover, he accused the latter of occupying themselves with the “Apswaization” of the indigenous Abkhazians, who were of Mingrelian and Svan origin in fact (Chabukiani 1995: 16, 19). He needed all of this in order to state that the “Georgians and Abkhazians (but not Apswas) were the indigenous population of Abkhazia” (Chabukiani 1995: 33-36).

He believed that the Abkhazians were always members of some Georgian political formation, be it the “Egrisi-Abkhazian” unity of the 4th – 6th centuries, or the Abkhazian Kingdom, or the Mingrelian Principality. He glorified the Abkhazian Kings for their promotion of Georgian culture as well as their sincere service to Georgian interests. He maintained that the peoples of historical Georgia always demonstrated an aspiration for unification and that even the banner of the Abkhazian Principality, similar to those of Imereti and Guria, was evidence of their common state. He also recalled that the Abkhazians, with the Georgians, had revolted against the Turkish yoke (Chabukiani 1995: 5-8). To put it in other words, like Nadareishvili, he objected to any Abkhazian authenticity and viewed the medieval Abkhazian culture as in essence “Georgian”. Yet, he had introduced some distinctions. While insisting on the identity of both the Georgians and the “true Abkhazians” in culture, he opposed them to the “Apswas” who were represented as savages, far from genuine civilization. He enumerated their “sins”: they had lacked any writing system until very recently, they had failed to create any great literary or architectural work, they were far from any “civilized religion” and worshiped idols (Chabukiani 1995: 25-26). Yet, while making all these charges, Chabukiani demonstrated his ignorance. First, while pointing to the lack of mosques in Abkhazia, he failed to mention that they had been destroyed by the Georgian Men’sheviki in 1918. Second, while stating scornfully that a smithy was worshipped by the “Apswa”, whereas that practice was unknown among the “true Abkhazians”, he challenged the Svan historian, T. Mibchvani who, on his side, was proud of the traditional worship of iron and smithies among the Svans (Mibchvani 1989a: 223-237).

Paying no attention to the dramatic Abkhazian history, Chabukiani arrogantly claimed that many Abkhazians were incompetent in their mother tongue, and represented them as if they were the “only people who lacked secondary education in their own language”. He also emphasized their poorer “intellectual abilities”, in contrast to the Georgians (Chabukiani 1995: 19, 49-50). He failed to mention though, that Abkhazian schools had been closed down and that forcible Georgianization of the Abkhazians had been implemented from 1937 to 1953. Yet,

none of this stopped him from making the statement that there had not been any oppression of ethnic minorities in Georgia (Chabukiani 1995: 23). Moreover, he went so far as to explain “maxadzhirstvo” by referring to lack of feeling for their Motherland on the part of the “Apswas-Abkhazians”. He cited the example of the “true Abkhazians” and the Georgians of Samurzaqano who stayed in their region at that time (Chabukiani 1995: 22, 48). Yet, he was not sincere here either. His reader would never realize from his report that the Muslims were exiled, rather than the Christians who accounted for the bulk of the Samurzaqano population!

Like Nadareishvili, Chabukiani was emphatically struggling against the Abkhazian view of the past. He labored to demonstrate that Georgians alone had created the whole east Black Sea region’s culture. Moreover, he accused the Abkhazians of the intentional destruction of Georgian historical monuments and Georgian place names in the territory of Abkhazia (Chabukiani 1995: 29-30). Finally, he deprived the Abkhazians of political initiative and maintained that Abkhazian separatism was encouraged by “Georgian renegades” who had once fled to Abkhazia and accepted Abkhazian identity in order to find good careers (Chabukiani 1995: 37, 49). It is worth mentioning that Chabukiani did not restrict himself to the struggle for Abkhazian territory. He recalled all the other lands that, in his view, had been forcibly annexed from historical Georgia by neighboring states (Chabukiani 1995: 15, table 3), and it was no accident that the cover of his booklet was decorated by a map of “Greater Georgia”.

All of these historical constructions of Georgian politicians and patriotic intellectuals were based on official Georgian scholarship represented, in particular, by a corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, the Chairperson of the Department of Georgian History of Tbilisi State University, Marika Lordkipanidze, a specialist in the early medieval history of Georgia. Very active in the political discussions of the late 1980s – early 1990s, she vigorously repeated the ideas both of the indigenous origin of the Georgians in Colchis and the late arrival there of the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians. She ardently advocated these ideas to various audiences (M. Lordkipanidze 1989, 1990)⁹⁵. She doubted that the early medieval Apsilae and Abasgoi could be identified with the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians, and preferred to view them as early Kartvelians. In her opinion, one had to distinguish between the local early Abkhazians and the “Apswas” who had arrived much later and given birth to the contemporary Abkhazians. She was inclined to identify with the Georgians not only the early Abkhazians but also other tribes (Sanigai, Misimianoi and the like) of early Colchis whose ethnic identities were quite obscure and the subject of continuing controversy. Following Ingoroqva, she insisted that the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians were backward highlanders who flooded Abkhazia in the 17th century after the region was “cleansed” of Georgians by Turkish raiders. She needed these ideas as a basis for presenting the Georgians as not only the indigenous population but as the dominant majority from very early times (Lordkipanidze 1990: 58-59)⁹⁶.

She developed the same views even more energetically and peremptorily in contemporary independent Georgia. Nowadays, she also brings in the Colchis archaeological culture of the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age, which in her publications turns into a “Kartvelian culture”. She maintains unreservedly that both the early Greek Argonaut myth and the early classical authors provide evidence in favor of the deep roots of the Kartvelian language in the southeast Black Sea region. It turns out that the Kartvelians lived throughout the coastal region as far as Tuapse in the northwest during the classical period. Although she recognizes the obscurity of the Apsilae and Abasgoi ethnic affiliation, she herself gravitates towards Ingoroqva’s ideas. In any case, she says, their territory was permanently part of certain Georgian states (Lordkipanidze 1995). At the turn of the 1990s, the philologist, A. Oniani disseminated Ingoroqva’s ideas, although he generously dated the Abkhazian arrival to Abkhazia to the 15th rather than the 17th century (Oniani 1990. For that, see Hewitt 1996: 198).

The problem of the Abkhazian Kingdom, its builders and the ethnic composition of its population is still a matter of very hot dispute between Georgian and Abkhazian intellectuals. At the turn of the 1990s, M. Lordkipanidze was probably the major ardent proponent of the Georgian view of this issue. This she manifested not only in her chapters in the aforementioned textbook on the history of Abkhazia and chapters in the fundamental multi-volume “History of Georgia” (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989) but also in her popular publications and talks for the public at large (M. Lordkipanidze 1989, 1990, 1995). She claimed that the “Abkhazian Kingdom was a Georgian state, as regards the vast majority of the population, language, culture, writing system and state policy...” (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 43, 1995: 7. Also see Totadze 1994: 22-23). To put it differently, she derived the Georgian identity of the Abkhazian Kingdom directly from the idea that Georgians accounted for the bulk of the population there, that there was a Georgian Church with a liturgy in Georgian, that the Georgian language enjoyed state status, and that masterpieces of Georgian literature and architecture were created in Abkhazia at that time. She cited the Academician Berdzenishvili: “The early Abkhazians, be they of Kartvelian origin or not, were the same Georgians in history and culture as the Egris, Svans, Kartes, Kakhis and all the Kartvelian ethnic groups, and took part in the building of the Georgian state and Georgian culture together with all the Kartvelian tribes” (M. Lordkipanidze 1995: 9).

It is easy to see that, in this context, the term “Georgian” (“Kartvelian”) was granted a civic rather than an ethnic meaning. Yet, neither was this approach able to satisfy the Abkhazians, for the views in question pictured them constructing an alien state and developing an alien culture. Moreover, even their very name was appropriated by this state and its culture. Indeed, as Lordkipanidze taught, the entire population of the state, including both the Georgians and Abkhazians, were called the “Abkhazians”, after the name of the state. That is why it was so difficult to discuss the ethnic identities of the various groups mentioned by the medieval authors in its territory. While recognizing this fact, Lordkipanidze still argued that

the terms “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazians” stood mainly for “Georgia” and “Georgians”, both in medieval Georgian and in foreign sources (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 46-47).

Besides, M. Lordkipanidze claimed that the ethnic identity of the early Abkhazian Kings was obscure. In her view, the title “Abkhazian King” only meant that the dynasty originated in the country of Abkhazia. In fact, the kings could have been of either Greek or Georgian ethnic origin. However, she insisted that the kings of the Abkhazians were Georgians in terms of culture and language (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 43. Also see Totadze 1994: 22-23).

While depicting the Abkhazians as highlanders from the north who brought their alien culture and their “Apswa” name to the local people, she granted these aliens with “Georgian self-awareness” and complained that, in the 19th century, Russian authorities “bent their efforts to replace Georgian self-awareness with an Abkhazian (Apswa) one”. Against all logic, she tried to convince the reader that progressive Abkhazians had objected to this policy (M. Lordkipanidze 1995: 9).

M. Lordkipanidze, who was awarded the title of Academician of the National Academy of Georgia in the new democratic Georgia, was by no means alone in her loyalty to orthodox Georgian historiography. Her approach was shared by many other Georgian Academicians. For example, in 1991, the well-known Georgian linguist, Academician Tomaz V. Gamkrelidze, put forward the idea that the term “abxaz” was in fact of west Kartvelian origin and initially was used as the name of a Kartvelian tribe, after which it was borrowed as the name for the whole country and its population. Only after the decline of the Abkhazian Kingdom was this term picked up by the local Apsilae, ancestors of the contemporary Abkhazians (Gamkrelidze 1991)⁹⁷.

A collection of articles entitled “Georgia – ‘a small empire’?!” (1990) played a special role in the Georgian propaganda campaign, because well known Georgian scholars were among its authors. One of the latter was a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR, the new Director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography, D. L. Muskhelishvili. In his article, he also reproduced all the main points of the concept of “dual aboriginality”. Those were the early presence of the Georgians (Colchian-Mingrelians, Svans, Meschi) in Colchis, the arrival of the Abasgoi and Apsilae in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D., and the establishment of a political and ethnic boundary between them and the Mingrelians along the Kelasuri River. On his side, Muskhelishvili added that it was only the Abkhazians, rather than the Georgians, who first built up a “small empire”; and it was the Abkhazian Kings who, despite their different ethnic origin, accomplished the major Georgian task while contributing to the unification of Georgia and promoting the development of its culture. Like Dzhanaashia and M. Lordkipanidze, he argued that the Abkhazian Kings were Georgians with respect to culture and policy.

Thus, he maintained, it was not Georgia that had integrated Abkhazia in the medieval period but Abkhazia, which had conquered Georgia and shifted to the

Georgian culture. However, a radical change occurred in Abkhazia in the 17th century, due to the expansion of the Caucasian highlanders. The Mingrelian Prince Levan III Dadiani had built a huge defensive wall along the Kelasuri River in order to stop them, but this did not help much, and the Abkhazians had progressed as far as the Inguri River by the early 18th century. Nevertheless, despite all these disturbances, the former Georgian population had survived in southern Abkhazia, and the Abkhazian nobility cultivated Georgian culture even in the 19th century. The growth of Georgian-Abkhazian tensions was caused, in the author's view, first, by the colonial policy of the Russian Tzarist government. Second, they were fostered by blind attachment to this policy on the part of Soviet authorities, who viewed the Mingrelians, Svans, Gurians and other local groups (apparently, the author included the Abkhazians to this list. V. Sh.) of Georgian people as separate independent peoples (Muskhelishvili 1990). The author released the Georgian authorities from any responsibility, and presented the Georgians as internationalists in their hearts. He failed to explain how this corresponded to the ethnocide in Abkhazia in 1937-1953, which he acknowledged.

Another author of the same book, I. P. Antelava, attempted to develop a new approach. He broke away of the common Georgian belief in the equation of ethnic origin with cultural background. He made a distinction between these two notions that colored all his reasoning. He had no doubt that there were ethnic relationships between the early medieval Abasgoi-Apsilae and the contemporary Abkhazians. At the same time, he emphasized the striking cultural difference between them, namely, the "degradation of their respective traditions" among the latter. He appreciated the activities of the medieval Abkhazians, who united the country as "close kin" of the Georgians rather than as conquerors (Antelava 1990: 20-21). Yet, he forgot that he himself had written of the "struggle for a unified Georgia", and that the de facto unification of Georgia in the 9th – 10th century was by no means carried out peacefully.

Like Muskhelishvili (in fact, following Ingoroqva), he also told of a flood of highlanders coming with their "primitive culture" in the 15th century, and represented the Abkhazian-Mingrelian wars of the 17th century not as local strife but as a civilizational "struggle between the Georgian socio-political system and the primitive social system of the highlanders" (Antelava 1990: 23). The author accused the Soviet powers not only of granting the Abkhazians autonomy, but also of reallocating "genuine Georgian (Mingrelian) lands". Moreover, Antelava first formulated the notions of privileged Abkhazian status in Abkhazia; of Georgian renegades who identified themselves with the Abkhazians for career reasons; and of their active role in the promotion of "Abkhazian extremism" (Antelava 1990: 25). As we have seen, these ideas were greatly appreciated by Georgian nationalists, for example, by Chabukiani. Ultimately, Antelava insisted that all Abkhazian territory had to stay with Georgia. Concerning Abkhazian autonomy, he suggested that it must be restricted to the Gudauta region alone (Antelava 1990: 27).

In brief, this collection of papers, which greatly affected the Georgian public,

deprived the medieval Abkhazians of their own culture and presented them as blind actors who fulfilled the “Georgian task”. When at last they obtained their own culture, it proved to be “primitive” and unworthy of the builders of any state. It seemed natural to the authors that the “more civilized” Georgians should run all the regions of Georgia. Surprisingly, while being fascinated with their own ideas, the authors did not see any contradictions between Muskhelishvili’s idea that, on the one hand, the united Georgian state was constructed by the Abkhazians, and on the other hand, it was the result of the “creative activity of only one people – the Georgians” (Muskhelishvili 1990: 8-9, 18).

Over recent years, a lot of propaganda literature has been published in Georgia and abroad in order to disseminate all over the world the Georgian view of the past. In 1995, Georgian journalists published another collection of essays in St. Petersburg that contained the aforementioned article by M. Lordkipanidze, with others of this sort. For example, one of the authors strove to prove that most of the place names as well as early ethnic names in Abkhazia had nothing to do with the Abkhazian language and were related to Georgian, instead. In particular, he referred to the famous “Bichvinta”, isolated it from its Greek roots and, following Ingoroqva, suggested a Georgian etymology. Besides, he hinted at Kartvelian origins for Leon I and Leon II, the rulers who built the Abkhazian state (G. Pipiia 1995)⁹⁸.

Another article was completed by the journalist B. Pipiia, who not only shared the Georgian view of the past but also artificially reinforced its Georgiocentrism. First, he reproduced Ingoroqva’s idea that the Abkhazians were highlanders who descended from the hills in the 17th century, and insisted that Abkhazia had always constituted an integral part of the local Georgian state. Second, he represented Kelesh-bey as a Turkish protégé and his son – who murdered him – as a Russian agent⁹⁹. Third, he accused the Abkhazians of the Georgian-Abkhazian war with all its terrible results, and kept silence on the anti-Abkhazian propaganda that was carried out by both official and unofficial Georgian media at the turn of the 1990s (B. Pipiia 1995). The same book contained an article by the Georgian demographer, A. Totadze (Totadze 1995), which was a shortened version of his book to be discussed further on.

At the same time, an article by L. V. Marshania, published in the same book, was a sign of a certain shift in the attitude of Georgian intellectuals towards the Abkhazian issue. By that time, Marshania, born of an Abkhazian family, was an Academician at the Agrarian Academy of Georgia. In his life he had occupied several high positions. He was the first vice-chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the Abkhazian ASSR, the Secretary of Ideology of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG (during the period of turmoil of the very late 1970s!), vice-chairman of a department in the CC CPG, and the like. Although he shared the Georgian stance in general¹⁰⁰ and was angry with the “Abkhazian Separatists”, his article appreciated the Abkhazian view of the past. He depicted the Abkhazians as the earliest inhabitants of the east Black Sea region, called the Abkhazian Kingdom an

“Abkhazian-Georgian state”, and openly discussed the demographic disaster that had turned the Abkhazians into a numerical minority in their own land. He pointed out that any talk about the relative share of Abkhazian and Georgian elements in the overall population of Abkhazia hurt Abkhazian feelings, because everybody knew what development, in particular, had caused the drastic decline in the Abkhazian population. While condemning “Abkhazian separatists”, he was the only author in the book who mentioned “Georgian extremists” as well. Actually he accused both of them of the unfortunate break between the Georgians and Abkhazians. He was also the only one who wrote of the excesses of the Georgian military in Sukhumi in August 1992.

The problem was not only the murders, burning down of private houses and the pillage. In November 1992, Georgian fighters burned down the ARIHLL with its unique historical archive as well as its archaeological and ethnographic collections. The Central State Archive of Abkhazia, the Party Archive of the Abkhazian Branch of the CC CPG, the local Museum of History and Ethnography in Sukhumi were all destroyed, as well as schools, libraries and theaters (for that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 300, note 2; Lakoba 1995: 101; Colarusso 1995: 83). This was the punishment of Abkhazian history, an attempt to deprive the Abkhazians of historical memory.

While condemning the extremism on both sides, Marshania mostly addressed the Georgian intellectuals, who proved unable to ease the conflict, while supporting the slogan of abolishing Abkhazian autonomy. He recommended that they should recognize that the Abkhazians were a distinct people, and it made no sense to confuse them with Georgians, as it was common for many Georgian ideologists and political activists to do. Moreover, he openly accused the Georgian military of pillage and crimes against the Abkhazians (Marshania 1995)^[10]. Marshania’s output was certainly courageous. Yet, one has to bear in mind that, first, he was able to do that due to his high position and because he had rendered great service to Georgia. Furthermore, the Georgian authorities viewed him, albeit in vain, as a real competitor of Ardzinba in the coming presidential elections in Abkhazia (Globachev 1999: 27). Second, the book containing his article was published in Russian and apparently was propagandistic. Third, his particular approach proved to be alien to the other authors, who continued to advocate the Georgiocentric view. Indeed, the authors of the preface depicted an extremely romantic pattern of complete national harmony in Georgia through the centuries and blamed the “Gudauta separatists”, Caucasian highlanders and some “destructive and reactionary agents of Russia” for what happened. There was no question of any guilt on the Georgian side (Pipiia, Chikviladze 1995). Yet, the very publication of an article by an Abkhazian author in a Georgian book signified a shift in the Georgian intellectual environment. True, these changes were by no means radical. Georgian authors were still loyal to their view of the past as the only true one, and treated the different Abkhazian approach as only “distortion of the past and appropriation of the Georgian history” (Totadze 1994: 22; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 32).

Recently, two Georgian historians published a thick volume whose title, “Abkhazia – an historical region of Georgia”, speaks for itself. The volume was edited by T. Sh. Mibchuanu who, as we know already, saw the Abkhazian Kingdom as populated by Svans alone and accused Voronov of distorting their early history. Mibchuanu was already an Academician of the National Academy of Georgia in the late 1990s. In this volume, the Abkhazian nationalists were represented as puppets of Russia, and historiography was called their main ideological weapon. “History, the Apswa historiography, which emerged during the Soviet era at the basis of Russian chauvinist social-political journalism of the 19th – 20th centuries, was hired to serve imperialistic interests” (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 9). Although the authors made every effort to distance themselves from the Soviet past, their writing style was very close to that of Soviet strugglers against the “fantasies of bourgeois historiography”. They were ardent advocates of the view that all the territory of Abkhazia and even the lands that stretched further down to the Kuban’ River in the northwest constituted a genuine Georgian territory, where Georgians had lived from time immemorial. They believed that, from the 11th century, the “Apswa tribes” began to infiltrate this region and “had occupied” the seashore up to the Inguri River by the 16th – 17th centuries. They also believed that the “Apswas” appropriated the Georgian name of the “Abkhazians” and that, before Abkhazia joined Russia, it was always a part of the Imereti Kingdom and, in ecclesiastical terms, was ruled by the west Georgian eparchy. They said that Russia used Abkhazia and the Abkhazians in order to exterminate the Caucasian highlanders, and so on (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 10-12)¹⁰².

The authors found it productive to link the ideas and scholarly approaches of these or other scholars directly with the facts of their personal lives. For example, Marr had taken an “anti-Georgian” stance after he was dropped from his position at the Department of the Georgian language of St. Petersburg University. They attributed his interest in the Abkhazian language to his “anti-Georgian attitude”. They said the English scholar, George Hewitt, supported the Abkhazians because he was married to an Abkhazian woman. The major Georgian scholars discovered an early Abkhazian-Adyghe sub-stratum in the east Black Sea region because this met the demands of the “Marrist period”. Everything that contradicted their own views the authors repudiated as theories that had been built to meet political demands. For example, Melikishvili’s idea of the identity between the Kashka and Abeshla of Asia Minor and the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors was treated in like fashion (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 16-18, 24, 27-28, 129, note 10, 144, note 112).

The authors viewed all the Abkhazian and Russian concepts of the history of Georgia indiscriminately and a priori as entirely ethnocentric and highly anti-Georgian. At the same time, when they were interested in the opposite view, they gave up their own methodological approach. For example, they condemned the leading Georgian scholars (Dzhavakhishvili, Dzhanashia, and Chitaia) for their attachment to the migrationist concept, and shared the approach of the Russian archaeologist Kuftin, who emphasized the indigenous Caucasian roots of the

Georgian culture. The authors gave up the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis. Instead, they shared Ingoroqva's argument in favor of the integration of the Abkhazians into the Georgian whole. This view identified the Abkhazian ancestors with west Georgian tribes who had shifted to "Adyghe speech" fairly recently (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 18-20).

While referring to archaeology, although in an amateur way, the authors identified the builders of the Colchis culture with the Georgians alone, extended its area to an implausible size (including eastern Georgia and southeast Turkey!), and "discovered" the Svan ancestors among the builders of the early dolmens (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 15. It is worth remembering that Svan-born Mibchuan was an editor of the volume!). While maintaining that the medieval authors did not distinguish between the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians and used the same term, "Abkhazians", for all of them, Gamakharia and Gogia failed to mention the well-known fact that the King's title always included references to various historical regions named after their inhabitants – "King of the Abkhazians, Kartes, Eris, Kakhis..." (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 37). Is not this evidence that the kings of medieval Georgia made distinctions among the various regional groups?

The authors by no means demonstrated their less-than-professional stance through their approaches to archaeological and philological data alone. A set of historical documents that made up half of their thick volume was published improperly as well. It lacked any previous historical analysis or any scholarly comments. Only documents were selected and published that met the demands of Georgian historiography. For example, the authors referred to the Russian Major, A. Diachkov-Tarasov, who related that the Abkhazians had once forced the Mingrelians southwards across the Inguri River. Yet, whereas the Major was referring to what had happened in the late 17th century, when the Abkhazian principality annexed some former Mingrelian lands, the authors represented the matter as though the Abkhazian highlanders had just begun their settlement throughout Abkhazia, occupied by Mingrelians alone, at an earlier time (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 44-45). Moreover, if historical evidence contradicted the Georgian view of the past, the authors accused them of a tendentious approach or poor knowledge of the real situation. Thus, the publication of the volume was obviously aimed at propagandizing the Georgian approach to history.

Naturally, the authors denied the Abkhazians' indigenous origins in Abkhazia and depicted them as recent newcomers from the northern Caucasus. Yet, the image of "newcomers" did not seem sufficient for the authors, and they represented the early "Apswas" as "Scythian aggressors" who exhausted Georgia by their bloody raids. While identifying the early Dzhiki, Abasgoi and Apsilae as Georgian tribes, the authors argued that the "Scythian aggressors" appropriated their names and conquered their lands in the 14th – 16th centuries. The "Apswas" were represented as the most bloodthirsty highlanders ever to invade Georgia. It was also said that they were doing their best to partition Georgia (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 26-32, 41).

It is easy to see that, while presenting the medieval history of Georgia, the authors reproduced all Ingoroqva's main arguments and emphasized that the medieval Abkhazians were ethnic Georgians. This volume clearly demonstrates the message of Ingoroqva's concept to contemporary Georgian politicians. Indeed, providing this concept is true, the mass Georgian peasant colonization of Abkhazia from the end of the 19th century might be viewed as the "return of the Georgian population that had been forced out of Abkhazia by the Apswa invaders in the 17th – 18th centuries" rather than as a "Georgian occupation" (Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 58).

Unfortunately, as is emphasized by the Abkhazian historian, Ingoroqva's concepts had successfully conquered both Georgian academic minds and educational places in the 1990s. For example, it made up the core of a collection of essays entitled "Researches in the history of Abkhazia/Georgia" published in Tbilisi in 1999. It seems that many historians of post-Soviet Georgia openly share Ingoroqva's approach (Lakoba 2000: 18, 2001a, 2001b).

All of this made the Abkhazians angry, while depriving them of a homeland, history, identity and, not least, political rights (for example, see Vozba 1989a; 1989b; Kokoskeria 1989; Taria 1989; Tsvinaria 1989; Inal-Ipa 1989b, 1992: 3-28; Ashkharua 1993; Otyrba 1994: 282; Marykhuba 1994b: 34, 40-53). An author of the first propaganda booklet, published just after the Georgian invasion of Abkhazia, depicted the recent past in the following way. "The facts, events, the whole layers of life of the classical and medieval Abkhazian ancestors were affected by juggling, polishing, or even open falsification, Georgianization" (Marykhuba 1993: 3). Indeed, it seemed indubitable to Abkhazian authors that the Abkhazian-Adyge ancestors lived in northeast Asia Minor and southwest Transcaucasia at least from the 4th – 3rd Millennia B.C. Much later, this homogeneous region was divided by the arrival of the Kartvelians, who pushed the Abkhazians-Adyghes to western Transcaucasia (Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Lakoba 1990a: 4-6, 2000: 16-17; Belaia kniga 1993: 19-21; Marykhuba 1993: 8-10; Marykhuba 1994b: 34-35; Otyrba 1994: 282). The Abkhazians are especially proud of their early genetic links with the Hatti, Kashkai and Abeshla of Asia Minor and emphasize that those tribes enjoyed their own state, one of the earliest in the world, and strongly influenced the Indo-European Hittites (Chirikba 1998: 38-40, 42-43)¹⁰³. The Abkhazians consider it unquestionable that they had been an integrated people in the territory of Abkhazia in medieval times rather than being recent newcomers there. Among other authors, this approach is shared by the historian Stanislav Lakoba and the archaeologist Sergei Shamba, both of whom were active in the building up of new Abkhazia. Lakoba was the vice-speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia, and Shamba was first the Chairman of the People's Forum of Abkhazia "Aidgylara" and then the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Abkhazian government.

This view is shared by the present president of Abkhazia, Vladislav Ardzinba, a professional historian and a specialist in the history of the early Near East who frequently refers to early history in his public speeches (Biguaa 1993). The

Abkhazian version of events (arguably with more historical support) links the Apsilae and the Abasgoi directly to the ancient Abkhazian-Adyghe groups. The Apsilae are associated with the Abkhazian's name for themselves, "Apsua", and the Abasgoi with the Abazinian self-designation, "Abaza". The Sanigai and the Misimianoi are treated as related populations rather than as Kartvelians (Inal-Ipa 1989b; Gunba 1989b: 140-150; Shamba 1989; Lakoba 1990a: 5; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 142; Marykhuba 1993: 11-14; Chirikba 1998: 44-47; Shamba 1998: 51, 58; Bgazhba 1998: 59). These tribes supposedly ruled the Black Sea littoral as far as the modern city of Sukhum and even further to the south, where they contacted the Mingrelians. In other words, it is argued that the Abkhazians already occupied all their modern territory by the 1st Millennium A.D. They were therefore the true local inhabitants rather than newcomers, with roots going back at least one and a half or two thousand years and possibly even longer (see especially Gunba 1989a: 139 ff., 1989b). Abkhazian archaeologists assume that the Abkhazians occupied the littoral through many thousands of years and it was they who left the Bronze and Early Iron Age sites, as well as the numerous tribal names mentioned by the classical authors (Shamba 1998: 51-56). It is worth noting that contemporary Abkhazian authors do not mention the Colchis Kingdom at all.

As concerns the Abkhazian Kingdom, Abkhazian authors may agree that the great majority of its population was made up of Kartvelians (Georgians) and that it was therefore at this time that Georgian gradually turned into the language of literacy and culture¹⁰⁴). They may also agree that the term "Abkhazian" was used in a broad sense at that time, and began to be applied to all the Kingdom's population in western Georgia. Nevertheless, the population was still multi-ethnic in composition. Moreover, the popularity of the Georgian language amongst the aristocracy, including its Abkhazian element, by no means prevented the commoners from speaking their native Abkhazian language. Indeed, as is well known, the Georgian nobility spoke foreign languages in the late classical time, which did not prevent Georgian commoners from speaking the Georgian language (Apakidze 1968: 278; Braund 1994: 215-216). Moreover, Abkhazian authors argue that it was precisely the establishment of the Abkhazian Kingdom that caused the consolidation of the Abkhazian tribes into a cohesive community. It then played the leading role in the life of the Kingdom. From their point of view, it is of great importance that the unifier of Abkhazia and the founder of the ruling dynasty, Leon II, declared himself to be "King of the Abkhazians" and is referred to in historic sources as "the Abkhazian ruling prince". All these facts are considered in the Abkhazian view to prove that the first true state in the territory of modern Georgia was founded by the Abkhazians (Gunba 1989a: 213-235; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Lakoba 1990a: 4; Marykhuba 1993: 19-20; Chirikba 1998: 47; Bgazhba 1998: 61-63)¹⁰⁵). None of this downplays the Georgian contribution to cultural development in Abkhazia, which was recognized by the publication of a photograph of the well-known Besleti Bridge with an old Georgian inscription from the 11th – 12th centuries in the newspaper, "Sovietskaia Abkhazia" (October 11, 1989. P. 4).

After Abkhazia had declared independence and open armed conflict with Georgia had taken place, the Abkhazian view of the past came to be more independent and more radical. It seems as though the authors of contemporary Abkhazian propaganda were attempting to base their statements on the aforementioned Ashkhatsava's concept of history. The latter's ideas were echoed in a booklet entitled "Of the Abkhazians and Abkhazia", written by the Chairman of the People's Party of Abkhazia, I. Marykhuba (Markholia), and published twice – first in September 1992, and then in February 1993, i.e. at the time of the Abkhazian-Georgian war. Apparently, the booklet was considered very important at that time. It was intended to encourage the Abkhazians and stir up their patriotism with the help of references to their great past. Its author, who had participated for a long time in the Abkhazian nationalist movement, depicted Abkhazia as the "Promised Land" where the first humans came into being. He represented the Abkhazians as the earliest people of the west Caucasus, who enjoyed one of the earliest languages in the world and who were descendants of the classical Colchians. In his booklet, he assumed that the Abkhazians already had their own writing system in early medieval times. Like Ashkhatsava, he maintained that the Georgian alphabet was invented based on the earlier Abkhazian one. He emphasized with pride that the Abkhazian state had developed without any breaks (sic! V. Sh.) over the last twelve centuries.

In contrast, the Georgians were represented as the newcomers in the Caucasus, who settled on former Abkhazian-Adyghe lands. The author argued that the Abkhazian people (*narodnost'*) had come into being several centuries earlier than the Georgians, and that the Abkhazian language had affected Georgian, rather than vice-versa. The united Georgian Kingdom was presented as being derivative of the Abkhazian one, and the honor of the title of the "King of the Abkhazians" was pointed out. In other words, the Georgians were granted the image of "younger brothers" who owed the elder brothers for all their virtues. Moreover, following Ashkhatsava, the author accused the great medieval Georgian historian, Vakhushti Bagrationi, of the falsification of history and encroachments upon the glorious Abkhazian past.

"Georgian apartheid" was called the main enemy of the Abkhazian people. The author insisted that continuous genocide of the latter be carried out over the last hundred years. Feeling free of former censorship restrictions, the author accused Georgian historiography of serving anti-Abkhazian political goals. All the main Georgian historical ideas were condemned, namely "Iberian-Caucasian studies", Melikishvili's theory of Georgian feudalism, Dzhanashia's views of Georgian medieval culture, Ingoroqva's and M. Lordkipanidze's picture of the recent Abkhazian arrival in Abkhazia, and the concept of "dual aboriginality" (Marykhuba 1993. Also see Marykhuba 1994b: 40-53)¹⁰⁶.

The war of 1992-1993, stirred up a lot of anti-Georgian feeling among the Abkhazians, which was manifested by their stated perception of history. Nowadays, the proclamation of Bagrat III, the King of the united Georgian Kingdom is treated

by the Abkhazians as a “national-political mistake” made by their ancestors (Istoriia Abkhazii 1991: 59; Nasha sila 1993: 29; Smyr 1994: 8; Chitasheva 1995) which has to be avoided in future. Some Abkhazian authors have an even more radical concept that has it that the “Abkhazian Kingdom was mostly the state of the Abkhazian people, even though it embraced other groups, including the Georgians” (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 143). At any case, the state that is called the “united Georgian Kingdom” by Georgian historiography is called “Abkhazian-Georgian”, or “Abkhazian-Imeretian”, by Abkhazian authors. It is this concept that encourages the Abkhazians in their struggle for sovereignty. It is no accident that President Ardzinba refers in his speeches to the ancient Abkhazian state as having been founded “more than 1,200 years ago” (Nasha sila 1993: 10; Biguaa 1993).

The confrontation with Georgia sometimes resulted in the building of quite extravagant historical constructions in Abkhazia. Thus, certain intellectuals view it as a local expression of the global struggle against world evil. The latter includes multinational states with their “imperialistic pride” that is based on the teachings of some “Cainite priests”, the bearers of negative power. The authors of this construction associate these priests with the proto-Chan tribes. Thus the Georgians have become the everlasting bearers of destructive energy aimed at the proto-Abkhazians-Yaphetids, who are the bearers of the principle of Good. The Evil agent expresses itself in “messianic dreams”, namely ungrounded Georgian claims and their attempt to build up a “small empire” as early as in the period of the Georgian Bagratids. The authors maintain that this is what caused the collapse of the Abkhazian-Imeretian Kingdom (Regel’son, Khvartskii 1997: 480, 502-503, 536-537, 547-548).

A more moderate Abkhazian approach to the historical process was manifested by the textbook, “History of Abkhazia”, that was completed by a team of Abkhazian scholars in the 1990s. This book had a dramatic fate. It came out in 1992 and was intended for the new school year. However, the Georgian-Abkhazian war broke out, and the great bulk of the printed copies were destroyed by the Georgian military in Sukhum. Nonetheless, Abkhazian authorities found it possible to republish the book in Gudauta in 1993. One can imagine how difficult it was for them to carry out this project. Yet, the new publication of the “History of Abkhazia” demonstrates the great importance of the past to both Abkhazian authorities and intellectuals. Indeed, the Abkhazian view of history was to shape the Abkhazian nation.

Note that the President of Abkhazia, Ardzinba, a professional historian himself, took part in this project. In collaboration with V. A. Chirikba, he wrote the “Introduction”, focused on the Abkhazian people’s origins (Lakoba 1993: 5-12). In this chapter, the Abkhazians were represented as the earliest indigenous population in all the territory of Abkhazia, as well as in certain Russian territories adjacent to the city of Sochi. The Abkhazian language was called one of the earliest languages in the world, a member of the Abkhazian-Adyghe family of languages, which itself constitutes part of the North-Caucasian linguistic stock. In contrast, the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis was given up as obsolete. The close relationships between the

Abkhazian-Adyghe languages and the dead Hatti language of Asia Minor were emphasized. The authors did not fail to remark that the Hatti strongly influenced the Indo-European Hittites. The Hatti were also mentioned as the inventors of iron metallurgy. Following contemporary linguists, the authors demonstrated that the bearers of the North Caucasian languages occupied a huge territory in the remote past, embracing not only the Caucasus but also large areas of the Near East and Asia Minor. They built the Hurrian and the Urartian states, and left their traces in the place names of the southeast Black Sea region.

It is worth noting that all of this accords well with the views of contemporary historical linguists. Indeed, the Abkhazians-Adyghe are the descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the east and southeast Black Sea regions. Yet, the authors of the "Introduction" went even further. They referred to the well known, albeit not well confirmed, hypothesis that derived the Abkhazians and the Adyghe from the Abeshla and Kashkai of early Asia Minor. Moreover, they represented the tribal alliance of the Abeshla and Kashkai as a strong power that the Hittites could not help but respect. The authors went so far as to find the "mighty state of Kaska" in the Upper Halys River Valley (Lakoba 1993: 10. Also see Lakoba 2000: 16-17). True, the authors were aware that, while deriving the Abkhazians from the Abeshla, they had to base their theory on the migrationist approach, and the Abkhazians would thus lose their absolute indigenous status. That was why they went back to the idea of the extensive Abkhazian-Adyghe settlement all along the Black Sea littoral, but did not fail to secure the glory of the mighty Abeshla and Kashkai for this entity.

In their quest for their glorious ancestors, they went even further, and recalled Turchaninov's "discovery" (though omitting his name). They pointed to an early writing tradition in the east Black Sea region that was related to the Byblos, Phoenician and Hittite writing systems (Lakoba 1993: 11). Referring to the archaeological data, the authors emphasized the continuity of cultural development in Abkhazia from as early as the dolmen period. All of this was also thought to demonstrate the long history of the Abkhazians, legitimize their indigenous status and relate them to the higher civilizations of the early Near East.

Needless to say, all the tribes of the east Black Sea region (the Heniokhoi, Achaeans, Apsilae, Abasgoi, Sanigai and Misimianoi) mentioned by the classical authors, are indiscriminately identified with the early Abkhazian tribes. In a similar way, the principalities of Apsilia, Abasgia, Misiminia and Sanigia are represented as the basis on which first the Abkhazian principality and then the Abkhazian Kingdom were formed. Naturally, all of this was connected with the political activity of the early Abkhazians. The name "Abkhazian" was derived from the early tribal name of "Abasgoi".

At the same time, neither Colchians nor the Colchian Kingdom were ever mentioned in the "Introduction", apparently to avoid arguments with the Georgians. Instead, they mentioned the numerous resettlements of particular Abkhazian tribes to the northeast, across the Great Caucasian ridge. Yet, there was no question of any

reverse movements of the highlanders, which attracted Georgian scholars so much.

All of these issues were discussed in other chapters of the textbook in more detail. All the chapters focused on the earlier past of Abkhazia, from the Stone Age up to the end of the Middle Ages, i.e. a third of the book, were written by Yuri N. Voronov in minor collaboration with his Abkhazian colleagues (O. Kh. Bgazhba wrote on early metallurgy and R. N. Katsia on folk culture and Islam). It is worth noting that, being a professional archaeologist, he was more cautious than the authors of the "Introduction" were. He avoided discussing the issue of the dolmen builders' ethnic origin and did not insist on cultural continuity between them and later local residents (Lakoba 1993: 28-29). Yet, his co-author, O. Kh. Bgazhba, expressed his pride that the Abkhazian-Adyghe ancestors invented iron metallurgy in Asia Minor. In contrast with the Georgians, he identified the Chalybes with the Hittites and represented the Kashkai and Abeshla as their successors in metallurgical craft (Lakoba 1993: 31)¹⁰⁷.

While discussing the classical period, Voronov got into ethnic issues as well. He identified the Heniokhoi with the Abkhazian ancestors, and viewed them as the builders of the "Colchis-Koban' cultural province" (Lakoba 1993: 33). At the same time, he did not mention the Colchians at all, and treated the Colchis Kingdom as a chimera, which had no good scholarly grounds (Lakoba 1993: 36). Instead, while referring to cultural continuity, he found the culture of the Abkhazian ancestors in the 6th – 4th centuries B.C., although, as we know, the term "Abasgoi" was first mentioned in the 2nd century A.D. (Lakoba 1993: 37). Moreover, he demonstrated close interactions between the early Greek and local cultures and called the Abkhazians the direct "successors of the classical culture" (Lakoba 1993: 45)¹⁰⁸.

Being the director of the archaeological project in Tsebel'da, Voronov was able to come to a conclusion that was in sharp contradiction with orthodox Georgian historiography. He had not found any significant cultural changes in the Tsebel'da Valley at the turn of the 1st Millennium A.D., and, on these grounds he rejected the hypothesis of mass migrations by the highlanders or any crucial ethnic transformations in the territory of Abkhazia in the first centuries A.D. He was convinced that the tribes that were well known to the classical authors were still continuing to live there, and he considered it possible to identify them with the Abkhazian ancestors (Lakoba 1993: 46-52).

As we know, while analyzing the early medieval period, Georgian authors emphasized the Laz Kingdom. In contrast, Voronov most stressed Apsilia and Abasgia, and mentioned Lazica only in passing. In his representation, it did not play any role in the political and cultural development of the Abkhazian tribes. It was even unclear in his chapter who in particular lived in Lazica. Voronov did his best to avoid discussing the problem of the Mingrelians-Laz. He only mentioned them twice, and not in connection with Lazica (Lakoba 1993: 61, 66).

Voronov was very cautious while discussing the baptism of the Abkhazians. In this matter, the archaeologist won a victory over the ideologist. He rejected all hypotheses of the early arrival of Christianity to Abkhazia, and pointed to the

legendary nature of evidence of St. Andrew's activities. With reference to his archaeological data from Tsebel'da, he demonstrated that even after the official baptism, the bulk of the Apsilae still observed their pagan rituals. In fact, it took about a hundred years (from the mid-6th to the early 7th centuries) to baptize them entirely (Lakoba 1993: 66).

Voronov's view of the emergence of a state in Abkhazia also differed radically from those developed by Georgian historiography. He believed that the Abkhazian elite was shaped within the Byzantine political tradition and had nothing to do with early medieval Georgian political formations. Even less was it connected to the Kartli kings, who had no sovereignty over Abkhazia (Lakoba 1993: 68, 71).

Voronov was less original in his approach to the causes and environment of the Abkhazian Kingdom's emergence. Yet, even here he dared to challenge Georgian historiography. First, he pointed out that the original name, "Abkhazian Kingdom", was used by Georgian sources only, i.e. the Georgians of those days in contrast to our contemporaries acknowledged the priority of Abkhazia. Second, before the 10th century, the Byzantines treated Abkhazia as their vassal, and, indeed, for important reasons, Abkhazia of the 9th – 10th centuries was closely connected with Byzantium rather than with Georgia. In this environment, there was no question of any "pro-Georgian" policy by the Abkhazian kings. Instead, the competition between separate rulers was characterized by each one's striving to enlarge his territories at the expense of his neighbors (Lakoba 1993: 73-77). In Voronov's view, it also made no sense to oppose some early settled civilized inhabitants of Abkhazia to any recent newcomers from the highlands as was done by Georgian historians. In fact, the great bulk of the free commoners of Abkhazia were engaged in transhumance pastoralism and did not differ much from the highlanders in their life-style (Lakoba 1993: 74, 86-87).

Concerning the architecture of the Abkhazian Kingdom, Voronov pointed out that its closest links were with the Byzantine tradition and wrote of the "Abkhazian-Alan school of the east Byzantine Church architecture". He found no particular Georgian features there. With reference to the earlier use of Greek in liturgy and literature, he emphasized that the Georgian influence failed to express itself until as late as the very end of the 10th century (Lakoba 1993: 87-89, 142). What Georgian authors used to call the "united Georgian Kingdom", Voronov defined as the "Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians", or, otherwise, the Bagratid Kingdom, after the ruling Dynasty. In his view, this was closer to historical reality. Indeed, first of all, the name "Georgia" came into being only in the 15th century, and second, that was how he appreciated the great importance of Abkhazian participation in the political process (Lakoba 1993: 90, 99).

The events of the 17th century were interpreted as internecine strife between the Mingrelian and the Abkhazian Princes, who struggled for territories and power within the region. There was no question of any mass migrations of the North Caucasian highlanders to Abkhazia, although it was recognized that the Abkhazian rulers recruited the Dzhygets, Kabardinians and Abazins from the northwest

Caucasus (Lakoba 1993: 122-126). It is worth mentioning that Voronov agreed with Georgian authors in that the so-called "Great Abkhazian (Kelasuri) wall" was built by the Mingrelian Prince Levan Dadiani against Abkhazian raids. In contrast, certain Abkhazian historians did their best to push its construction much further into the past and to isolate it from Mingrelian activity. They did this simply because, for the Georgians, it served as crucial evidence that southern Abkhazia (Samurzaqano) was always populated by Mingrelians (Lakoba 1993: 123-124). According to the orthodox Abkhazian view, Abkhazian expansion southwards as far as the Inguri River was presented in the textbook as a return to their traditional lands, which had been occupied by the Georgians for a while (Lakoba 1993: 126).

Another textbook on the history of Abkhazia, recently published in Maikop, is of no less interest. After the Abkhazian-Georgian war, Maikop, the capital of the Republic of Adygheia, became an important center for the Abkhazian intellectuals who found refuge there. The textbook was written by a Russian writer under Abkhazian control, and the Abkhazians reviewed and edited it. Furthermore, it was apparently affected by the Gudauta textbook analyzed above. The structure of the Maikop textbook is worth considering. Half the volume (57 of 122 pages) focuses on the prehistoric, classical and early medieval past, up to the 8th century A.D. That is, the Golden Age of the Abkhazian past is heavily emphasized. From the very beginning, the reader is fascinated with the deep and rich Abkhazian prehistory. He or she becomes familiar with both the Sino-Caucasian and North Caucasian families of languages that penetrate the past as deeply as 10-11 thousand years, and realizes that the Abkhazian language was an important participant in this linguistic development. Thus it is displayed as a "unique relic" worth protecting.

While narrating early history, the textbook establishes a direct link between the Kashkai and Abeshla of Asia Minor, on the one hand, and the late classical Abasgoi and Apsilae, who are called Abkhazian ancestors. The Sanigai and Misimianoi are viewed as proto-Abkhazian tribes. Objections are made to their having any relationship with the Svans (Yagovitin 1995: 5, 23, 41-42, 49). At the same time, the Colchians are missing, and the Colchis Kingdom is treated as an historical myth. Instead, the early Greek colonies are appreciated as having brought civilization to the east Black Sea region. The adjacent provincial archaeological culture is identified with the Abkhazian ancestors. An analysis of the classical past ends with the conclusion that the "Greeks and the Abkhazians became relatives in both blood and culture". The Abkhazians are declared to be the direct successors of the classical culture (Yagovitin 1995: 36).

Archaeological data play a significant role in the textbook. The rich warrior burials near Sukhum, dated to the 4th century B.C., are associated with the Abkhazian nobility. The Tsebel'da region is viewed as the most important center of the late classical and early medieval Apsilae who, according to archaeological evidence, underwent the formation of a complex society at that time. The long cultural continuity of that region is interpreted in favor of the idea of population continuity, and the author denies any highlanders' migrations in the first centuries

A.D. The Christian churches in Tsebel'da are identified with invaluable Abkhazian relics because it is there that the baptism of the Abkhazians commenced (Yagovitin 1995: 37-42, 47, 50). In fact, archaeological excavations in Tsebel'da shed new light on rare early medieval evidence. Iranian armor of the 6th century A.D. was found which confirmed the early medieval Persian claims to the East Black Sea region. Bricks with stamp prints of the bishop Constantine, who had baptized the Apsilae in the 530s, were discovered. Changes in burial rites permitted scholars to trace the movement of former pagans to Christianity during the 6th – early 7th centuries. The author also pointed out that the earliest Christian domed church in the former USSR territory was found in Dranda in Abkhazia (Yagovitin 1995: 47, 50). In brief, Christian antiquities in Abkhazia are especially emphasized in the textbook that, as we shall see further on, is of great importance to contemporary Abkhazians and is closely connected with the current political environment.

The lead stamps from the 7th – 8th centuries, found in Pityus, are interpreted as evidence of complex socio-political and religious organization, where the Abkhazian noble people played a significant role. They were granted Byzantine titles and served Byzantine interests, and it is with their names that the well-known list of medieval Abkhazian rulers (“Divan of the Abkhazian Kings”) began (Yagovitin 1995: 52-53). The textbook narrates the growth of power and prestige of the Abkhazian ruler Leon I, who took advantage of the favorable political situation and, while being the ruler of Abasgia, managed to peacefully appropriate the territories of Apsilia, Misiminia and Lazica in the mid-8th century. His success was extended by his nephew, Leon II, who being supported by the free commoners, united western Georgia and established the Abkhazian Kingdom. It is obvious that the author owed much to Dzhanashia’s approach. He disagrees with him in only one but very sensitive point for the Abkhazians. He refuses to see any “Georgian policy” in Leon’s actions, and, following Voronov, depicts him as a typical feudal despot who was led by his own interests, although in the long range his policy resulted in the unification of all the Kartvelians (Georgians) within one and the same state (Yagovitin 1995: 55-63).

This state is portrayed as multi-ethnic. The Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Zyghoi (Adyghe), and Alans lived there side by side with the Abkhazians and Georgians. Yet, the Abkhazians always played an important role there, which was demonstrated by the fact that the nickname of Queen Tamar’s son, derived from the Apsars’, i.e. the Abkhazian, language. All these sorts of facts are interpreted in the textbook in favor of seeing the Abkhazians enjoying a distinct body – “their own language, political autonomy and leaders”. The author goes so far as to talk of some distinct administrative unit, which was formed in Abkhazia in the 12th century (Yagovitin 1995: 82-85). This was how a historical basis for the contemporary independence of Abkhazia was being developed.

The eastern direction of the Abkhazian kings’ expansionist policy is explained with reference to the geopolitical environment of those days. Indeed, the Abkhazian neighbors in the north (the Khazar Khanate) and in the south (the Byzantine

Empire) had mighty states, and one had best avoid conflicts with them. In contrast, the Abkhazian move to the southeast was encouraged by Byzantium, which viewed that expansion as being aimed against its Muslim enemies. The textbook intentionally distances itself from the anti-Byzantine attitude of Soviet historiography and emphasizes friendly relationships between Abkhazia and the Byzantium. Rather, the author does his best to disprove the Georgian idea of the early subordination of the Abkhazian Church to the Mtskheta catholicos (Yagovitin 1995: 66-68).

The author advantageously uses archaeological data in order to demonstrate cultural growth in the territory of historical Abkhazia in the 8th – 10th centuries. He tells of flourishing trade and crafts, very active seaports, and extensive church construction. In contrast with Georgian historiography, the buildings are defined, following Voronov, as of the “Abkhazian-Alan school of the east Byzantine tradition”. The important role of Byzantium is demonstrated by the predominance of Greek both in bureaucracy and liturgy. Georgian inscriptions appeared in Abkhazia only from the very end of the 10th century (Yagovitin 1995: 71-72). To put it differently, Abkhazia was closely connected to Byzantium until the very late 10th century. There was nothing Georgian there at that time.

The initiative on the unification of Georgia is also ascribed to the Abkhazians. They, rather than the Tao-Klargeti ruler, enthroned Bagrat III. The point is made that, after that time, the name of the state was the “Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians”, and this turned into the “united Georgian Kingdom” only in the 19th – 20th centuries, due to Georgian historiography. The author argues that the crucial historical symbols of the Abkhazian identity of the Kingdom were, first, the primary place of “King of the Abkhazians” in the Georgian Kings’ title, and second, the fact that Bagrat III chose to be buried in the Bedi Church in Abkhazia, rather than in the Mtskheta Christian center. Having said all of that, the author comes to the following conclusion. “If Abasgia and Apsilia had not developed in the 6th – 8th centuries within the Byzantine cultural-political system, if there had not been a politically independent, albeit Christian... Byzantinized, Abkhazian Kingdom in the 8th – 10th centuries, the cultural-historical unity called an “all-Georgian” one nowadays, which gravitates to the same Christian world, would not have been shaped in the 11th – 13th centuries” (Yagovitin 1995: 75). At the same time, in order to satisfy both the Abkhazian Christians and Muslims and to emphasize the deep roots of Abkhazian religious tolerance, the author reminds the reader that Bagrat III’s coins bore the Arabic inscription “Muhammad – the messenger of Allah” on one side, and the Georgian inscription “Christ, extol Bagrat, King of the Abkhazians” on the other (Yagovitin 1995: 76).

In order to secure a reasonable balance, the author of the textbook does not sacrifice the Georgian contribution to cultural development in medieval Abkhazia. He mentions that the Abkhazian nobility was fluent in Georgian, that the local Church was ultimately Georgianized, and that Abkhazia enjoyed great works of Georgian architecture (Yagovitin 1995: 87-88). Yet, he remarked that the

commoners kept speaking Abkhazian and still observed their pagan rituals. The latter was confirmed by archaeologists, despite the lack of historical evidence.

The hot problems of the 17th century are represented in the following way. That period was characterized by a permanent state of war between the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians. The Abkhazians enjoyed strong support from the north Caucasian Sadzes, Abazins and Kabardinians who arrived from across the mountain ridge. In those days certain Kabardinian Princes subordinated highland communities in Abkhazia, and the Abkhazians partly resettled to the southeast, in Samurzaqano. From that time, the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians were divided by the Inguri River (Yagovitin 1995: 104-109).

The textbook concludes with two main ideas. First, the Abkhazians were a distinct people with their own rich and complex history, and it is no accident that they “courageously defend their right to their own place on the Earth”. Second, under Soviet power, their history was drastically distorted for the sake of so called “peoples’ friendship”. This, in practical terms, expressed itself by the appropriation of the past by the “chosen peoples” and also by the “construction of a mighty state [in the past] whose boundaries were made to coincide with those established after 1917, or seen as even more extensive” (Yagovitin 1995: 120-121). Georgian historiography is not referred to, but the thoughtful reader immediately realizes who is being indicated with these words.

Thus, both textbooks analyzed above inform the reader that the Abkhazians lived in Abkhazia from time immemorial and were closely connected with the early civilizations of Asia Minor. The great value of the Abkhazian language and the necessity of protecting it are emphasized. It is argued that a highly stratified society was shaped in Abkhazia in an evolutionary way, which resulted in the establishment of the Abkhazian Kingdom by the Abkhazians themselves, by both kings and commoners. It is also argued that, in their policies, the Abkhazian Kings were led by their own selfish interests and the given political environment rather than by any irrational “all-Georgian” interests, which were in fact lacking. The great contribution of the Abkhazians to building the Georgian state is acknowledged, and the Georgians have to appreciate that. At the same time, any Georgian participation in the formation of the Abkhazian political and cultural system is denied. Instead, the beneficial impact of the classical Greeks and Byzantium upon the Abkhazians is emphasized to the extent that the Greeks are in fact included in the list of Abkhazian ancestors. An early Christian tradition among the Abkhazians is especially appreciated, although Abkhazia is persistently depicted as a multicultural and multireligious country, which practiced tolerance. Finally, the continuity of the development of the distinct Abkhazian ethnic community and its political organization is demonstrated, which must establish an historical basis for Abkhazian aspirations to sovereignty. It is worth mentioning that many arguments are derived from archaeological rather than historical sources. Thus, the decisive role of archaeology in the construction of the past of formerly illiterate peoples is apparent.

There is no doubt that the textbooks, which exhumed and refreshed the memory of the remote past, succeeded in inflaming Abkhazian self-awareness, while providing it a basis in the deeper layers of the past and attracting them through their great ancestors' deeds. This was no less promoted by an article on Abkhazia in the academic handbook, "Peoples of the World" (1988), which called the Abkhazians a very early people, contemporaries of the early Near Eastern civilizations (for example, see Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Khobotoev 1989; Marykhuba 1993: 17).

Abkhazian self-awareness was also affected by the discoveries of Soviet historical linguists who formulated the theory of the North Caucasian linguistic community in the late 1980s, and made a successful attempt to relate it to the Sino-Tibetan languages, on the one hand, and the North American Na-Dene languages, on the other. Fascinated by these tremendous perspectives, the Abkhazian historian, S. Lakoba, reasoned in his popular book that Abkhazian might be the future language of all humanity. While doing this, he referred to certain Russian writers of early in this century, who used this sort of hyperbole in order to show respect to Abkhazian hospitality. In that book, Lakoba emphasized specific features of Abkhazian development in early medieval times, namely, the great number of free commoners who helped the Abkhazian Kingdom rise above its neighbors. At the same time, he pointed to the drastic ethno-demographic changes in Abkhazia in the late 19th century, after which the Abkhazians turned into an ethnic minority in their own land (Lakoba 1988: 5-14, 22, 28)¹⁰⁹). Thus, recent history could not but provoke negative emotions among the Abkhazians. Rather, the great distant past stirred up the Abkhazian imagination and allowed them to look forward with optimism. At the same time, the Georgians were irritated with all this Abkhazian ethnocentric reasoning (Totadze 1994: 30-32, 1995: 41-44; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 17).

The Abkhazians were not satisfied with scholarly arguments alone. Alarmed by the hostile propaganda disseminated by the Georgian media, in May 1989 the Abkhazians addressed the Oracle who, they believed, lived in the mountain of Achandara in the Gudauta region. They asked the Oracle to clarify when Abkhazian ancestors had settled in Abkhazia. According to my informants, the Oracle confirmed that the Abkhazians were an indigenous people, occupying their own lands (Shnirelman 1989a). This encouraged the Abkhazians and helped them to resist the Georgian invasion.

CHAPTER 10

HISTORY, RELIGION, DEMOGRAPHY, POLITICS

When the Abkhazians felt that their language, culture and identity were in a state of emergency, they appreciated any fact (or fiction!) that might confirm their indigenous status and long history in Abkhazia, or was evidence of Abkhazian-born people receiving international recognition. That is why the well-known Abkhazian writer, Alexei Gogua, alarmed by the contemporary conditions of the Abkhazian people, was so attracted by the Abkhazian identity of Ioann Petritsi (although the term “Abasgoi/Abkhazian” had an inclusive meaning at that time) and insisted on recognition of Turchaninov’s “discovery” (although it had been disproved by scholars) (Gogua 1989). At the same time, while accusing him of credulity and careless use of historical data, his opponent, the professional historian, M. Lordkipanidze, did not avoid serious errors herself. For example, she maintained that non-Georgian speech was recorded in western Georgia only from the 17th century. While doing this, she failed to mention the “Apsar” nickname of Queen Tamar’s son, which was evidence of the “Apsars”, i.e. Abkhazians, in the region by the end of the 12th century (Tsulaia 1991: 118; Hewitt 1996: 199). Further on, with reference to an article by the Academician Yu. Kocharava, in the newspaper “Akhalgazrda Komunisti” (June 6, 1989), she argued that the Abkhazians accounted for only 17.6 percent of the population of Abkhazia by 1921. At the same time, according to the national census of 1926, the number was 27.8 percent, and even a Georgian demographer recognized that (Totadze 1994: 13. Also see Muller 1998: 232). Actually, she referred to the smaller number in order to avoid discussing the hot issue of the decrease of the Abkhazian’s percentage in the overall population in the 1940s – 1950s. Indeed, M. Lordkipanidze attempted to deny there were mass Mingrelian resettlements in Abkhazia during that period. While remarking correctly that Gogua used too high a number for the Georgian migrants (200 thousand), she herself used much lower numbers than were correct. For example, she insisted that the Georgian population increased by 79 thousand people in Abkhazia between 1926 and 1959 (in fact, it was by almost 90 thousand! V. Sh.). While giving the number of Russian and Armenian migrants, she forgot (? V. Sh.) to mention Georgian ones (M. Lordkipanidze 1989. Cf. Totadze 1994: 13). M. Lordkipanidze disseminated all these ideas through Georgian newspapers and on TV at the turn of the 1990s (for that, see Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 141).

In fact, in all her presentations during that time (M. Lordkipanidze 1989, 1990)

she reproduced the orthodox Georgian view of history, developed over the preceding decades. At the same time, as was demonstrated by Voronov, many of her key arguments could not survive thorough criticism. First, the hypothesis of the Colchis Kingdom especially as concerned its "Georgian" population, remained highly disputable and does not prove anything (Voronov 1989a. Also see Belaia kniga 1993: 27). As we have already seen, its active use by Georgian politicians is caused by reasons that are far from scholarly.

Second, nowadays there are many archaeological arguments in favor of the long cultural continuity of Tsebel'da from the 8th century B.C. until the 8th century A.D. This means that it is incorrect to consider the Apsilae together with the Abasgoi migrants who arrived only in the first centuries A.D. They were doubtless Abkhazian ancestors who lived there from very remote times. Third, over its first 150 years, the Abkhazian Kingdom was closely connected with Byzantium, and the extensive use of Greek was good evidence of that. There was no question of any "Georgian policy" of its rulers during that period. In his response to the Academician Beridze, Voronov remarked quite correctly that the early medieval Abkhazian rulers were driven by their own selfish interests rather than by any "all-Georgian" ones, and the notion of "Georgia", or "Georgian land" came into being much later (Voronov 1989c).

Fourth, during the period of the so called united Georgian state, the Abkhazians, on the one hand, were very active in its politics and enjoyed the respect of its rulers, and on the other hand, held onto their own identity. One had to acknowledge that Georgia inherited important Byzantine elements of its power structure through the Abkhazian Dynasty. Fifth, whereas there is good evidence of Abkhazian resettlement in the northern Caucasus in late medieval times, reliable evidence of any reverse movement is lacking. Finally, Christianity was introduced to Abkhazia in the 4th – 5th centuries A.D., and was controlled by the Constantinople patriarch for centuries. Greek not only dominated the liturgy until the late 10th century, but was used by the Church on equal terms with Georgian until as late as the 14th century¹¹⁰. Voronov also pointed out that all the early Christian churches in the territory of Abkhazia should be defined in the context of the east Byzantine tradition rather than ascribed to Georgian architecture (Voronov 1989a, 1989b). Voronov's views strongly affected contemporary Abkhazian historiography, although they were rejected by the Georgian counterparts.

In 1988-1989, the issue of Abkhazian religious identity had a high profile. At that time, many Georgian authors, following Ingoroqva's concept, identified the Christian population of medieval Abkhazia with the Georgians and linked the decline of Christianity there with the mass migration of the North Caucasian highlanders, who had adopted Islam very quickly. Simultaneously, the Georgian mass media cultivated an image of Christian Georgia surrounded by hostile Muslim peoples. They did this in order to find sympathy in the Christian countries of the West. An important role in this strategy was played by the image of the Abkhazians, who were represented as entirely Muslim and closely associated with Muslim

fundamentalists. Georgian TV disseminated rumors of close contacts between the Abkhazians and Turkey and Iran (although the Abkhazian Muslims were Sunnis! V. Sh.). After the Lykhny declaration was adopted by the Abkhazians in February 1989, which claimed the inclusion of the Abkhazian Republic into the Russian Federation, Tbilisi TV said that the Abkhazians were planning to establish a Muslim Caucasian republic (Shnirelman 1989a; Belaia kniga 1993: 15)¹¹¹). Georgian politicians were also alarmed by the Muslim factor (Nadareishvili 1996: 34).

Passions have become further inflamed since the events of July 15 – 16, 1989, in which Abkhazians of Turkish origin (a father, daughter and nephew) played an active part. They bravely resisted an armed Mingrelian group who attempted to cross the Ghalidzga River and reach the Abkhazian side. All my Abkhazian informants were grateful to these courageous people, who saved them from a massacre. Yet, to the Georgians, this was one more piece of evidence of the close contacts between the Abkhazians and Turkey. Rumors circulated that the First Secretary of the Gudauta Regional Cell of the CPG, K. K. Ozgan, received weapons from Turkey in order to arm the Abkhazians against the Georgians.

The tendency to treat all Abkhazians as Muslim fanatics became even stronger under President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The historian, Marika Lordkipanidze, openly supported this when she represented all Abkhazians in western Georgia as true Muslims and bloody enemies of Christianity (M. Lordkipanidze 1990: 50). All of this once again reminded people of Ingoroqva's views, since he had once insisted that pagan nomads had forced the Christians out of Abkhazia in the 17th century. In exhuming this concept, M. Lordkipanidze was by no means alone. Certain other Georgian historians followed her in that (for example, see Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 45-46). A propaganda booklet, published in Kutaisi in 1995, warned of the aspirations of the "Apswa separatists" to build up a "new Muslim state in the Caucasus at the expense of the territory of historical Georgia", in order to isolate Georgia from the Christian world (Chabukiani 1995: 2, 51).

This propaganda was rather effective. While in Sukhumi in the fall of 1989, I heard from many Georgians and Russians about preparations in the Muslim world for a decisive battle against Christianity. Significantly, by Muslims, people meant not only Azeris and Abkhazians but also Ossetians (who are mostly Christians). A Russian woman told me that, although the Abkhazians had neither mosques nor mullahs, they were Muslims by birth. All of this corresponded perfectly well with the image of a besieged fortress that was intensively forged by Georgian propaganda (Shnirelman 1989a).

In fact the religious situation in Abkhazia is more complicated (Clogg 1998; Lakoba 2000: 16). Sunni Islam predominates in the north (mainly, in the Gudauta region), and Orthodox Christianity predominates in the south (mainly, in the Ochamchira region). At the same time, the Abkhazian attitude towards both professions of faith is rather restrained. For example, Christians did not attend service for the chief reason, they said, that they were not competent in Georgian, which was the language of the liturgy (Smyr 1994: 19). Another explanation, which

I heard, was that the sinners going to hell depicted on the icon in the Gudauta church looked very much like Abkhazians, and the latter did not like that.

As concerns Islam, it was even less lucky in Abkhazia. In 1918, the Georgian Men'sheviks burned all the mosques, because they suspected that the Muslims were both disloyal and in contact with Turkey (Smyr 1994: 17). In the 1930s – 1950s, people were afraid of talking about Islam at all, since at that time Muslims were persecuted and Muslim peoples were being deported. It seems that all the Muslim customs in the Gudauta region were represented by only one – refusal to raise pigs. Local Abkhazians told me that this did not stop them hunting wild boars and eating pork, though.

Anyway, in 1989-1992 the Abkhazians did their best to distance themselves from Islam and emphasize their ancient Christian roots. For example, S. Lakoba argued that the Abkhazians were baptized in early medieval times and that, in contrast, Islam (which had been introduced in the 16th – 17th centuries) had never enjoyed full acknowledgement. Instead, he reminded readers of successful attempts by both the Arabs and Turks to Islamize the Georgians (Lakoba 1995: 101-102. Also see Tsvinaria 1989). More than ten years ago Abkhazian scholars became very interested in their Christian heritage. Even earlier, both Anchabadze and Inal-Ipa had pointed out that Christianity was introduced very early to the Abkhazians.

In 1989, certain Abkhazian intellectuals did their best to prove that St. Nino had arrived in the Caucasus by sea and first baptized the Abkhazians, after which she moved to Georgia. Yet, very soon they gave up this idea, for St. Nino's image was alien to the Abkhazians. At the same time, she was highly appreciated by the Georgians as their first enlightener. In October 1989, they decided to put up a statue of her at the Museum of Archaeological Expeditions in Tbilisi, and in June 1991, the Georgian Church celebrated the anniversary of St. Nino's arrival in Javakheti. Indeed, according to Church tradition, she came to Mtskheta along the Kura River Valley (Igumen Vladimir, Vigilianskii 1992). At the same time, Church tradition also told that St. Andrew had brought Christianity to Sukhum, Mingrelia, Ossetia and some other regions. As we already know, the Abkhazian archaeologist, M. Gunba, revived Basaria's ideas (Basaria 1923: 77) in the 1980s and based his own arguments about the introduction of Christianity into Abkhazia on the legend of St. Andrew's trip. Not only did he give an implausibly early date for that, he also did his best to prove that Christianity was rapidly accepted by all the local inhabitants (Gunba 1989a: 81-97). Other Abkhazian authors were more careful. Yet some of them argued that Christianity was established in Abkhazia from the very late 3rd – very early 4th centuries A.D. (Bgazhba 1998: 60).

To put it other way, the dispute focused on who was baptized first – the Georgians or the Abkhazians (Shnirelman 1989a. Also see Belaia kniga 1993: 24). All of this caused a curious tendency at the time of the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993. Some Abkhazians tried hard to return to Christianity. It was emphasized in a propaganda booklet, published at that time, that Abkhazia was an early Christian country (Marykhuba 1993: 38). Moreover, certain Abkhazian intellectuals

attempted to prove that Abkhazia was a country of genuine “pre-Flood” monotheism and the homeland of its bearers, the Japhetids, “proto-Abkhazians” who brought this concept to all the other peoples. In this view, the route of their migration is marked by early dolmens. Their missionary activity resulted in the formation of the group of peoples who made up the basis for the future Christian world. In particular, it is from the Abkhazian lands that the Semitic peoples borrowed the monotheist tradition. Although Christianity itself had emerged outside Abkhazia, the Abkhazians were among the first people who were baptized by St. Andrew. These intellectuals claimed that there was no other path of Abkhazian development except within the Orthodox Christian tradition (Regelson, Khvartskii 1997: 105-117, 507-511, 515-516, 533-534, 555).

This tendency did not enjoy mass support though, because, due to intensive Georgian propaganda, Christianity began to be closely associated with Georgia and the Georgians, and that did not meet the demand for an Abkhazian identity. That is why, recently, the revival of traditional animist beliefs can be observed in Abkhazia that are closely related to the concept of “apsuara” or “Abkhazianness”, that are the basis of the Abkhazian worldview and behavioral stereotypes (Smyr 1994: 19; Chitasheva 1995; Shnirelman 1998b: 16-17). For example, there was a call for such a revival by the Minister of Public Education and Culture of Abkhazia, at the World Congress of the Abkhazian-Abaza people held in October 1993 (Nasha sila 1993: 15). Yet, Christianity enjoyed some support in Abkhazia, in particular due to the energy of a new young priest in Novy Afon. It is worth noting that Christianity develops peacefully side by side with animism, and this priest, with an icon in his hands, sometimes participates in major animist ceremonies (A. Inal-Ipa. Personal communication, June 2000).

At the very end of the 1980s, the demographic issue proved to be a new field for the Georgian-Abkhazian ideological battle. For the first time, this was clearly formulated in the “Abkhazian letter”. Then, discussions were actively developed by Inal-Ipa and other Abkhazian authors (Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990, 1992: 115-136; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991). In fact, the discourse was pushed forward by numerous statements by Gamsakhurdia and other Georgian political activists who argued that 17 percent of population of Abkhazia (i.e. ethnic Abkhazians) enjoyed unbelievable privileges, as though they had exploited all the rest of the people of the republic (for example, see Gamsakhurdia 1989). That was why Abkhazian scholars delved deeper into ethno-demographic statistics, which demonstrated dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of the local population during the last 100-150 years. During this period, the Abkhazians turned from the dominant majority into an ethnic minority in Abkhazia (Muller 1998).

Inal-Ipa was one of the first to begin to analyze the nature of this ethno-demographic shift. He argued that, until the mid-19th century, the Abkhazians lived in the territory between the Inguri River in the southeast and the city of Sochi in the northwest. However, the territory run by the potentate of Abkhazia was smaller. It embraced the lands between the Inguri and the Bzyb’ Rivers. Inal-Ipa maintained

that all these lands were occupied chiefly by Abkhazians. There were almost no other ethnic elements there. The Caucasian War and some other wars of the late 19th century had resulted in the Abkhazian tragedy – Maxadzhirstvo, i.e. the resettlement of a great number of Abkhazians in Turkey between the 1840s and the very late 1870s. It is difficult to provide a precise number of migrants. Yet, Inal-Ipa estimated it at a hundred of thousands of people. He also referred to the American researcher, E. Toledano, who mentioned that 150 thousand people were forced out in 1863 alone. However, all these numbers contradicted the data of Inal-Ipa himself, who wrote that there were a total of 100-150 thousand Abkhazians by the mid-19th century.

Anyway, all the lands north of the Bzyb' River, as well as the central part of Abkhazia, (Sukhumi and Gul'ripsh regions) were depopulated through forcible resettlement. It is there that a stream of new settlers (Russians, Armenians, and Greeks), who had to serve the Russification policy of the Tsarist government, was directed. As a result, as early as 1873, Sukhum was a city mainly of Russians, Greeks, Armenians and Mingrelians. Inal-Ipa especially emphasized the Mingrelians and pointed out that the measures implemented by the Russian authorities in order to restrict their migration did not help much. Indeed, despite all the attempts of the Georgian demographer, A. Totadze, to prove that the resettlement of the Mingrelian peasants was hampered by numerous artificial obstacles, it is evident from his own statistic that, between 1886 and 1926, the number of Georgians in Abkhazia increased by 34 thousand people, i.e. almost doubled (Totadze 1994: 13, 37). The Mingrelians already accounted for 64 percent of the overall population in the Sukhumi region in the early 1870s (Muller 1998: 222, 226). Mass Mingrelian resettlements in Abkhazia were especially encouraged in the 1930s – 1950s, i.e. within living memory. As a result, whereas the Abkhazians still made up the predominant majority (55.3 percent) of the population in Abkhazia in 1897, their share had dropped to 15.1 percent by 1959 (Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990, 1992: 127-147; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Shamba, Lakoba 1995: 12-15; Chumalov 1995: 63-67; *Belaia kniga* 1993: 30).

True, certain Abkhazian authors were too incautious in their dealing with the early less reliable demographic evidence and carelessly referred to population numbers that had to be put into doubt. For example, with reference to Gulia (Gulia 1925: 294), V. Kvarchia and T. Achugba pointed to the decrease in the Abkhazian population from 600 thousand to 200 thousand people between the mid-17th and the end of the 18th centuries (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 145). Their other statistical data on the bulk of the 19th century, when there were no censuses at all, were also highly doubtful (Totadze 1994: 6-7; Muller 1998: 219).

Anyway, Abkhazian scholars did their best to demonstrate that up to 1870 the Abkhazian region was populated entirely by ethnic Abkhazians and that from the mid-1880s on, their share in the overall Abkhazian population progressively decreased. They referred to the fact that, on the eve of World War I, the Abkhazians still predominated demographically, accounting for about 60 percent of the

population. Indeed, according to a value free researcher, they accounted for 60.9 percent of the population of Abkhazia in the early 1870s (Muller 1998: 222). Their sharp demographic decline was caused, in the Abkhazian view, by the intentional policies of the Georgian authorities. First, under the Men'sheviks, the inhabitants of Samurzaqano were registered as Georgians. Then, the same occurred during the national censuses of 1926 and 1939. Mass resettlements of Georgians to Abkhazia were encouraged in the 1940s-1950s, when, on the other hand, some ethnic minorities (Meskhetian Turks, Greeks, Assyrians, and Kurds) were deported out of Georgia (Sagaria 1990; Ashkharua 1993). As a result, during slightly more than 100 years, the Abkhazians lost their predominant position and turned into an insignificant minority. Between 1897 and 1989, the Abkhazians grew in numbers from 58,697 to 93,267, and the Georgians in Abkhazia from 25,875 to 239,872. As a result, in 1989 the Abkhazians accounted for 17.8 percent, and the Georgians for 45.7 percent of the population in Abkhazia (Hewitt 1993: 269). Thus, Abkhazian authors concluded, the sharp decrease of both the relative and absolute number of Abkhazians in Abkhazia was caused by the "mechanical growth of the non-Abkhazian population and, partly, by artificial assimilation of the Abkhazians" (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 146-150. Also see Lakoba 1990a: 99-100; Marykhuba 1994b: 24-25; Dzaphsba 1996: 60-62).

The Georgian view is different, as reflected in what President Edward Shevardnadze said in the Georgian parliament in October 1992. At that time, he maintained that the drop in the Abkhazian share of the population of Abkhazia was a natural process that had nothing to do with the Georgians. To put it another way, he did his best to disprove the idea that the resettlement of the Georgians to Abkhazia was intentionally organized by Georgian authorities (Hewitt 1995: 57). Since that time, Georgian authors have begun to argue that the Georgian migrations did not affect demographic processes in Abkhazia in any significant way. Then again, even if the migrations were induced artificially, that was done for the best, in order to confront counter-migrations of Russian-speaking people. The Georgian demographer, A. Totadze, came to grips with this problem most firmly. Whereas, by Abkhazian estimates, Abkhazians accounted for 85.7 percent of the population in Abkhazia in 1886 (Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 147), Totadze gave different numbers and argued that they already constituted a minority at that time (Totadze 1994: 7). What was the nature of these contradictions?

One of the hottest issues, which inflames endless disputes between the Abkhazians and the Georgians, deals with the problem of historical Samurzaqano (the contemporary Gali region of Abkhazia). This region is a permanent apple of discord between the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians. This made the Russian authorities take it under their own control as early as 1845. Abkhazian authors emphasize that initially this land was occupied by Abkhazians. It was seized by the Mingrelian rulers in the very late 13th – very early 14th centuries. Yet, it was taken back by the Abkhazian Principality in the 17th century (Dzidzaria 1960: 100 ff.; 1961: 18; Inal-Ipa 1965: 142; Anchabadze 1976: 67; Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Inal-

Ipa 1992: 110-111; Lakoba 1993: 162-164). It is worth noting that Basaria noted that the name “Samurzaqano” itself derived its origin from the name Murza-khan (“Murzakan” in Abkhazian), who was born to the Shirvashidze family and ruled the territory between the Okhurei and Inguri Rivers (in the far south of Abkhazia) (Basaria 1923: 98).

Whereas many Mingrelians lived there during the period of Mingrelian rule, later Abkhazians made up the great bulk of the population (Anchabadze 1976: 67; Anchabadze et al. 1986: 60-61; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 144). Yet, Samurzaqano was greatly affected by the Mingrelians once again in the early 19th century. In 1811-1813, many Mingrelians found refuge there from famine and epidemic, and after 1813, the region once again joined the Mingrelian principality for some time. However, in the Abkhazian authors’ view, all of this had not resulted in any significant changes in the ethnic composition of the population. Indeed, even in the very early 20th century, the Mingrelians accounted for only 13 percent of the population there, and in the 19th century the local residents use to identify themselves with the Abkhazians (Basaria 1923: 100; Pachulia 1976: 151; Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990: 39-40, 1992: 117-119; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 146; Lakoba 1993: 163). At the same time, Abkhazian-Mingrelian mixed marriages became popular there from the late 19th century, and Mingrelian was already predominant at the end of the 19th century. The matter of culture and self-awareness was somewhat more complicated. Inal-Ipa pointed out that the local inhabitants held either Abkhazian or “Samurzaqano” identity even after the language shift had occurred¹¹²). K. D. Machavariani had already convincingly substantiated this in 1899 (Inal-Ipa 1992: 121-122; Hewitt 1996: 200-201). Moreover, the Samurzaqano residents identified themselves with the Abkhazians even in the early 1920s, and this was recorded by the local census of 1922/1923 (Muller 1998: 226). However, they were forcibly recorded as Georgians during the census of 1926, and this was repeated once more in 1935, when people received their new passports (Marykhuba 1994b: 19, 57). As a result, almost all the local residents identify themselves as Mingrelians nowadays, although they enjoy a mixed Abkhazian-Mingrelian culture (Basaria 1923: 101-102; Inal-Ipa 1989a; 1990: 40-42. For the deep Abkhazian past in Samurzaqano, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 84-114).

The Svans also migrated in the recent past. There were no Svans north of the Upper Inguri River before the mid-19th century. Later on, they moved northwest, and reached the Upper Kodori River where the “Abkhazian Svaneti” was established (Inal-Ipa 1989a, 1990: 39-42).

In the meantime, Georgian authors viewed the matter quite differently. First, they maintain that the Abkhazians illegally seized part of the Mingrelian territory at the end of the 17th century and assimilated the Mingrelian population. Second, they believe that the Mingrelians always lived there. It is difficult for contemporary Georgians to imagine that the situation could have been different in the past (Koranashvili 1989a; Tskitishvili 1989; Muskhelishvili 1990: 11-12; Antelava 1990: 24; Gvantseladze 1992; Totadze 1994: 8-9; Nadareishvili 1996: 11-12,

21; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 58-60). Yet, this approach was developed by the Georgians relatively recently. The first to identify the Mingrelians with the Samurzaqano people was Ya. Gogebashvili. He was a well-known activist in public education in Georgia in the late 19th century. Just after the Russian-Turkish war of 1877 – 1878, he published a series of articles calling on the Mingrelians to colonize the devastated Abkhazian lands (for that, see Lakoba 1993: 206-207; Marykhuba 1994b: 21-22). At that time he exploited the ecological argument, and argued that the Mingrelians were much better adapted to living in the marshy lowlands than anybody else. At the same time, he recognized that initially the Samurzaqano people belonged to the “Abkhazian race”, and were greatly affected by the Mingrelians later on. Yet, in a children’s book published slightly later, he maintained without reserve that the “Mingrelians and the Samurzaqano residents were the same people” (for that, see Hewitt 1993: 275, 1998: 118). In fact, Gogebashvili claimed that Abkhazia, rendered lifeless after the maxadzirs had left, could only be settled by the Mingrelians (Lakoba 1993: 207; Lakoba 1998a: 84-85). It is worth mentioning that it is in this intellectual environment that, in the late 1870s, D. Bakradze began to view the Georgians (Mingrelians) as the indigenous inhabitants of the east Black Sea region between the Kuban’ River in the north and Trebizond in the south. He treated the Abkhazians as later newcomers (Bakradze 1878: VI. For that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 20).

That is why, while ignoring historical changes, Georgian demographers unreservedly equate the Samurzaqano people with the Mingrelians¹¹³). They accuse the Abkhazians of including the Samurzaqano people of the late 19th century in their own community (for example, see Totadze 1994: 8). Totadze believes that the fact that the Samurzaqano people did not take part in the Maxadzirstvo is clear evidence that they did not associate themselves with the Abkhazians (Totadze 1994: 8). By contrast, Basaria pointed out that when, after the revolution of 1917, the Georgian authorities strove to break Samurzaqano away from Abkhazia and include it in Kutaisi Province, the local residents made a strong protest, and the authorities had to give up this plan. For him, that was evidence that they identified themselves with the Abkhazians (Basaria 1923: 103). Actually, both authors made the same methodological mistake. Indeed, there are no good grounds to link political behavior firmly with ethnicity alone.

A result of the manipulations of the ethno-demographic data is that the Georgian and Abkhazian population figures for the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century reveal dramatic inconsistencies. For example, according to Abkhazian calculations, there were 58,963 Abkhazians and about 4,000 Georgians in Abkhazia in 1886 (Lakoba 1990a: 99; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 147). In the Georgian view, these figures were 28,320 and 34,806, respectively (Totadze 1994: 13, 1995: 31). It is worth noting that the Abkhazian calculations are in good agreement with the national census of 1897. It is instructive that the Georgian demographer drops the latter’s data out of his demographic table¹¹⁴). He ignores the 1939 census, as well. Yet, the latter, taken together with the following censuses,

provides strong evidence of the dramatic growth of the Georgian population in Abkhazia from 91,967 people in 1939 to 158,221 in 1959 (Lakoba 1990a: 99; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 149. Also see Hewitt 1993: 269, 272). Following Totadze, other Georgian ideologists perform the same manipulation of the statistical data (Antelava 1990: 28; Chabukiani 1995: 38, table 8; Nadareishvili 1996: 21).

Thus, whereas the Georgian demographer strove to demonstrate more careful and professional analysis of the ethno-demographic data, he proved the obvious tendency to downplay the Abkhazian demographic losses of Maxadzhirstvo, to exaggerate the Georgian presence in Abkhazia in the 19th century, and to downplay the Georgian role in the drastic demographic changes of the mid-20th century. While manipulating the population numbers, he emphasized that the Georgian population increased 3.1 times in Abkhazia, whereas the Russian population increased 6.6 times (Totadze 1994: 12, 1995: 25-31). Yet, in reality, the absolute rather than the relative numbers are of most practical importance, and they were disproportionate. The Russian population increased by 68,000 people in that period (59,300 people, according to the Abkhazian data. See Lakoba 1990a: 99), whereas the Georgian one increased by 145,000, i.e. twice as much¹¹⁵). Then, the main body of the Mingrelian migrants arrived in Abkhazia in the 1940s, when the Georgian authorities did their best to turn the Abkhazians into an insignificant minority (Muller 1998: 236).

These ethno-demographic manipulations are by no means all innocent. It is with reference to them that Gamsakhurdia argued that “pristine” Georgian lands were incorporated into Abkhazia and that in contemporary Abkhazia the Abkhazian ethnic minority illegally “dominated over the rest of population” (Gamsakhurdia 1989). At the same time, it is worth mentioning that both the migrants themselves and their Abkhazian neighbors had a clear memory of the resettlement. According to my informant, 55 Mingrelian families settled in his village in 1948-1949. All of them knew quite well how that had occurred. None of them would even think of the place as non-Abkhazian land (Shnirelman 1989a. Also see Bakhia 1989; Dzhokhadze 1989).

Meanwhile, with reference to the theory of “dual aboriginality”, the Georgian demographer maintained that the Georgians were the “indigenous inhabitants of Abkhazia”, which excused their mass resettlement. Moreover, pointing to certain Autonomous Republics and Autonomous Regions of the Russian Federation, where the indigenous peoples also proved to be numerically small, he emphasized that their share in the power structures was even less there than their share in the population. With reference to the reverse pattern in Abkhazia, he came to the conclusion that there was discrimination against Georgians there (Totadze 1994: 13-18. Also see Gvantseladze 1992).

He intentionally confused ethnicity with citizenship and, referring to medieval chroniclers, maintained that the Georgians and the Abkhazians already constituted one people in the 11th – 15th centuries. Note that he included the Ossetians in this “people” as well. Moreover, in search of arguments, he recalled Delba’s definition

that “Abkhazians were the same as Georgians”. Yet, he failed to mention the environment in the 1940s when this was said (Totadze 1994: 18-19, 1995: 34). Finally, he went so far as to argue that, “while fighting in Abkhazia, the Georgians are not only defending their own land but are also rescuing Abkhazia and the Abkhazian people from disappearing” (Totadze 1994: 38). To put it differently, the abolition of Abkhazian autonomy, the destruction of the Abkhazian cultural and intellectual heritage, and the killing of Abkhazians were represented as good for the Abkhazian people. Suffice it to say that the Abkhazian population in Abkhazia decreased from 97,000 to 90,000 people between 1989 and 1999 (Globachev 1999: 27).

Another Georgian author put forward different arguments. He believed that the mass Mingrelian resettlement to Abkhazia in the 1940s was a defensive measure in order to stop the Russians, who had been moving there over the two preceding decades. This could result in the Russification and assimilation of the Abkhazians. Indeed, a substantial flow of Russians to Abkhazia was observed between 1926 and 1939 (Muller 1998: 235). Thus, in the view of this Georgian author, the Georgian authorities implemented an adequate demographic policy in response. That was an anti-imperialist rather than an anti-Abkhazian policy, in his opinion (Gvantseladze 1992). The Georgianization of the Abkhazians seemed to him far preferable to their Russification. He also failed to mention that the policy in question was directed from Moscow rather than from Tbilisi. Finally, a very popular opinion among the Georgians is that many Georgians, who lived in Abkhazia, were pressed to be recorded as “Abkhazians” on their passports. Thus, the official number of Abkhazians became higher than it was in fact (Gvantseladze 1992; G. Pipia 1995: 21). Everybody who knows how the Mingrelians all over Georgia, including Abkhazia, were forcibly recorded as “Georgians” would doubt this idea.

Thus, whereas the Georgians were most attached to state integrity, and were fixated on an integral view of history, language and culture because of that, the Abkhazians worried about maintaining their distinction and resisted possible Georgianization. It is in this context that in 1989 both sides viewed the very sensitive Mingrelian issue from opposite viewpoints. At that time, side by side with other informal organizations, the movement for Mingrelian autonomy emerged in western Georgia. The group used to disseminate leaflets calling for separation from Georgia. Passions were especially aroused during the national census of 1989, when certain Sukhumi Georgians, fascinated by slogans about “democracy” and “freedom of speech” attempted to register themselves as Mingrelians. However, they were pressed by the head of the census campaign to change their identity to Georgian (Shnirelman 1989a).

Naturally, the Mingrelians were angry with that. The Gudauta newspaper, “Bzyb”, published letters from Mingrelians who, for the first time in many decades, began to insist on their distinct identity. They complained about the unjust attitude towards the Mingrelian language, about the disappearance of Mingrelian identity from the Soviet censuses after 1926, and about the imposition of Georgian identity

upon the Mingrelians (Bokuchava-Gogulia 1989; Dzhozhuva 1989, 1990. For that, see Hewitt 1995a: 303-305, 1999: 489-490). Abkhazian authors strove to exploit the Mingrelian issue in order to demonstrate the existence of discrimination against ethnic minorities in Georgia (Ya. Lakoba 1989; Tsvinaria 1989). In order to manifest their sympathy to the Mingrelians, Abkhazian authorities promoted the introduction of Mingrelian courses in the school curricula in the Gali region in 1993 – 1994 (Hewitt 1995a: 308), and attempted to publish the newspaper “Gal” in three languages there – Abkhazian, Russian and Mingrelian (Hewitt 1999: 477). At the meantime, the majority of the Mingrelian refugees who had returned to the Gali region avoided supporting the Abkhazian policy of “Mingrelization” (A. Inal-Ipa. Personal communication. June 2000).

At the same time, the Georgians viewed the Mingrelian aspiration to emphasize their authentic identity as simply a threat to the integrated “Georgian national organism”. The Mingrelian issue got especially hot at the very beginning of the 1990s, when the Mingrelian-born President Gamsakhurdia was shaping a new Georgian political elite made up of Mingrelians and their neighbor Svans (Boikova 1991). It is no accident that after his fall, he found the most support in Mingrelia (Goldenberg 1994: 86). In order to avoid stirring up emotions in Mingrelia, Georgian ideologues did their best to emphasize the close relationships between the Kartvelian and the Mingrelian languages, and any hint of Mingrelian authenticity was perceived in Georgia as a Mingrelian aspiration for separatism (for example, see Totadze 1994: 19-21). All attempts by an English philologist to protect the Mingrelian language and identity are treated in Georgia simply as “anti-Georgian activity” (Totadze 1994: 20-21, 42; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 17). Mingrelians who asserted their authenticity were persecuted (Hewitt 1996: 214, note 50).

By contrast, the Abkhazians always emphasized their tolerance towards various ethnic and religious groups. Once, S. Basaria pointed out Abkhazian indifference towards “nationalism” and their inherent respect for human rights (Basaria 1923: 85-86). Recently, the Abkhazians link this altruistic stance with their moral concept of “*apsuara*” (Ashkharua 1993). The latter is manifested by the new national symbol, adopted by the Republic of Abkhazia. First, this symbol is characterized by intentional eclecticism. It includes, on the one hand, early Genoan symbols, and on the other hand, colors symbolic of the Mountain Republic of 1918 – 1921. Second, the combination of white and green stripes on the contemporary Abkhazian banner, where white is associated with Christianity and green with Islam, is intended to demonstrate religious tolerance (Marykhuba 1993: 37-38)¹¹⁶. The Abkhazian right to their state symbol was approved by the Abkhazian-Georgia agreement, signed in Moscow on April 4, 1994 (Hewitt 1999: 477).

The intellectual debates in question demonstrate perfectly well how and for

what goal the ethnocentric approach “helps” to resolve complicated problems of the remote past. For example, scholars still lack any reliable evidence to resolve the Colchian Kingdom issue convincingly. Notwithstanding, Georgian historians and archaeologists emphatically advocate a view of a viable and powerful early Kingdom in western Georgia that facilitates claims for the civilizing role of the Georgians and, thus, their power over the east Black Sea region.

Thus, the ideological struggle between the Georgians and the Abkhazians is waged, first, for cultural supremacy (i.e. who was the first to discover iron, to be baptized, to introduce a writing system. They also discuss the ethnic origins of the well-known cultural activists of the past). Second, it is waged for territorial supremacy (who had the right to claim indigenous status in Abkhazia and its lands). Finally, it is over state supremacy (who founded the first state in western Transcaucasia). In the views of both sides, any particular resolution of the issues in question should legitimize the right of one of them to own the Abkhazian territory and to enjoy political power there. This became especially meaningful during the last few years when the Abkhazian struggle for sovereignty reached its climax. That is why the Georgian-Abkhazian discourse on what happened in the remote past extended far beyond historical disciplines, and both sides treat the solutions, unacceptable to themselves, as an encroachment upon a sacred national place. One cannot disagree with M. Chumalov in that the Georgian-Abkhazian war was preceded by an “ideological struggle” focused on the interpretation of the Abkhazian past (cited from Khoshtaria-Brosse 1993: 128)¹⁷). Both sides were well aware of that, and it is no accident that, when passions reached a climax, certain Georgian and Abkhazian authors warned against the abuse of prehistory and early history, and called on people to avoid using an intellectual controversy as a means of political confrontation (Trapsh 1989; G. Pipiia 1995: 22; Marshania 1995: 197).

Like the Armenian one, the Georgian identity is shaped mostly by language. To be a Georgian means most of all to speak Georgian. As we know, the language factor plays an important role in shaping the concept of Georgian ethnogenesis, which imposes Georgian upon all Georgian ancestors. At the same time, while the linguistic factor plays an isolating role among the Armenians, it is viewed as a basis for integration by the Georgians. That is why, whereas Georgian proper (Kartvelian) differs a great deal from the Mingrelian and Svan languages, although it is in the same family, Georgians ignore this difference. They elaborate their ethnogenetic schema and identify all those who ever spoke a language belonging to this family of languages as their ancestors. Moreover, while developing the idea of Iberian-Caucasian relationships, they did their best to include both North Caucasian (Abkhazian-Adyghe and Nakh-Daghestani) peoples and their linguistically dead relatives, the Hurrians, the Urartians and the Hatti, in this entity. Thus, the Georgian ethnogenesis strove to integrate the cultural heritage of all these peoples, and provided grounds for both the assimilation of certain non-Georgian groups (Abkhazians) and for claiming their territories. As a result, the Georgian ethnogenetic schema played and still plays a big political role, while elaborating an

ideological basis for national unity that incorporated as many local Caucasian residents as possible, appropriating the early historical heritage of the neighboring peoples, and claiming territories beyond the borders of contemporary Georgia.

In fact, the Georgian-Abkhazian confrontation included the intellectual appropriation of an alien past, which actually contained many shared elements. Instead of providing an easing of the situation, the latter aggravated it, since the past is one of the major symbols of identity. In these circumstances, in order to integrate an ethnic minority, the dominant majority emphasizes cultural or linguistic similarities and a shared past. On the opposite side, to resist assimilation an ethnic minority stresses distinctions and the authenticity of both its culture and its past. In the interests of integration, the majority bends all its effort to including the minority's past into its own. The more successful the majority is in the political subjugation of the minority the more persistently it occupies itself with the appropriation of the minority's past and ascription of the latter to its own ancestors. This is how a myth of everlasting and unbroken national unity is forged. Meanwhile, if the minority's representation of the past is hampered or persecuted, its ideology becomes more radical, and its myth of the past suffers from megalomania.

The ethnogenetic myths of the Georgians and Abkhazians are built up in opposition to each other. If statehood makes up the core of the Georgian myth, then the Abkhazian one is based on the idea of aboriginality. Both myths compete for the most remote past and for the heritage of the Near Eastern civilizations. At the same time, both of them value indigenous status. To give but one recent example, it was claimed at the World Congress of the Abkhazian-Abasa people, held in October 1992, that, wherever the Abkhazians lived nowadays, Apsny was their ancestors' land, their cradle, the homeland of their language (Nasha sila 1993: 4). Meanwhile, the Abkhazians are content with cultural continuity over millennia, whereas the Georgians combine this with state continuity. For the Georgians, the idea of state is closely related to identity, to the Georgian spirit. By contrast, the Abkhazians acknowledge multi-culturalism and multi-profession of faith, and the Abkhazian myth puts the emphasis on tolerance. True, in their struggle against the Georgian myth, the Abkhazians also emphasize state continuity, but to them continuity for 1,200 years seems sufficient. Yet, according to the Abkhazian ethnologist, Yu. Argun, "We need a state not for the sake of a state as such, but to protect us and to secure the millennial Abkhazian culture – apswara" (Nasha sila 1993: 63). Sometimes, the Abkhazians emphasize the homogeneity of the population in Abkhazia until the mid-19th century. This is by no means a crucial point of the Abkhazian myth. It is a consequence of the competition with the Georgian myth, which insists on the idea of the "dual aboriginality" that implies that the Georgians always lived in Abkhazia and were even the dominant majority there from time immemorial. The Abkhazians were especially indignant that the concept of "dual aboriginality" even found a place in books dealing with the Constitution of the USSR (Marykhuba 1994a: 446, 458). They treated that as a dreadful threat to their

own people.

The Georgian myth has a major influence on Georgian political orientations, and it was no accident that a partisan of this myth, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, won the first presidential elections in democratic Georgia in 1990. It was also no accident that the first actions of his political movement in 1989 and of his government, later on, caused escalation of ethnic tensions and conflicts in the Ossetian, Azeri, Armenian, Ajar and Abkhazian regions of Georgia (Jones 1992: 80-81; Goldenberg 1994: 100-101). The ethnic minorities immediately understood the nature of this myth directed against them. Nowadays Georgian experts themselves recognize close links between unrest among ethnic minorities and the chauvinist rhetoric of the Gamsakhurdia regime (Nodia 1998: 30; Kokoev, Svanidze 2000: 39).

For the Abkhazians, the debates in question are by no means all only theoretical. They deal with their urgent vital interests. Since November 1988, Georgian nationalists have openly demonstrated their intention to eliminate Abkhazian autonomy, and in 1991, president Gamsakhurdia managed to resettle 4,000 Avars to Dagestan. While addressing Georgian chauvinist propaganda of 1988-1989, the Abkhazians were quite nervous about the future of the Abkhazian Republic and felt threatened by the coming assimilation by the Georgians. The Avars' resettlement seemed to confirm their worst fears. Being aware of their few numbers in Abkhazia, the Abkhazians were certain that if democratic elections were held, they would lose access to power, i.e. the right to control the territory where their ancestors had lived for centuries. The Georgians were quite aware of this as well (for example, see Antelava 1990: 26-27). That is why the Abkhazians were very sensitive about the main point of Georgian historiography, which argued that the Georgians were the first settlers in Abkhazia. The Abkhazians understood quite well that, if this idea took root in Georgian minds, it would be able to powerfully affect the choice of the electorate, which would lose an important inducement to vote for Abkhazian candidates (Shnirelman 1989a; Shamba 1990: 8). Indeed, voting behavior in post-Soviet republics demonstrates that regardless of ethnic affiliation, people are inclined to support the candidates of the titular population (cf. Beissinger 1997: 166).

As it was put by my Abkhazian informant in the fall of 1989, it would be an insult for the Abkhazians to be Georgian citizens, for that would mean learning both the Georgian language and culture, i.e. a threat to the Abkhazian language and culture (Shnirelman 1989a). The war of 1992-1993 confirmed these alarms. It convinced the Abkhazians that the Georgian authorities were striving to build up a monoethnic state, that did not acknowledge any ethnic minority rights (for that, see Ashkharua 1993; Lakoba 1995: 99, 101). It is the aim of the monoethnic state which is the basis of the Georgian ethnogenetic myth discussed above. At the same time, the Abkhazians bear in mind the federal political structure of Georgia, which should secure rights for ethnic minorities (Shamba 1990: 8).

In order to understand the dramatic essence of the Georgian-Abkhazian intellectual confrontation, one has to bear in mind that under the hierarchical Soviet

ethno-administrative system, the cultural and social status of any ethnic group was closely connected with its political status. This caused unequal perspectives for further development (Gogua 1989) and colored political relationships between peoples, while affecting their vital interests and fostering an inferiority complex among ethnic minorities. While responding to their Georgian counterparts, Abkhazian authors emphasized the abnormality of the situation, where people were being convinced that they did not constitute a distinct people, and at the same time were called to live in “peace” and “friendship” with the dominant majority (Lakoba, Shamba 1989). It is in this environment that ethnic minorities are searching for “historic justice”. In 1989, I was introduced to a whole list of Georgian scholarly publications that were treated as “anti-Abkhazian” by Abkhazian scholars.

True, over recent years, the idea of a broad federalism is more and more appreciated by the Georgian public (Kokoev, Svanidze 2000). According to a sociological survey carried out in Georgia in 1997-1999, tolerance towards both the Abkhazians and Ossetians is growing among the Georgians (Dzebisashvili 2000: 154). Thus, there is hope for positive changes in Georgian-Abkhazian relationships. At the same time, these changes are apparently hampered by the fact that the view of the Abkhazian past, based on Ingoroqva’s ideas and objected to by the Abkhazians, is still being taught in Georgian schools (Lakoba 2000: 18).

Part III

THROWN OVER THE RIDGE

CHAPTER 1

SOUTHERN OSSETIA IN THE GEORGIAN CONTEXT

The South Ossetians live in the central part of northern Georgia. Their historical territory embraces the northern part of Kartli Province, the Dvaleti and Ksani regions, and the easternmost areas of the historical Racha and Imereti lands. South Ossetians accounted for 3 percent of the overall population of Georgia (164,055 of 5,443,000 people) in 1989. The smallest portion (65,000 people) lived in Southern Ossetia, whereas the rest of them were widely dispersed throughout Georgia, including in its capital. At the same time, the Ossetians were the dominant majority (66.2 percent) in Southern Ossetia itself, followed by the Georgians (29 percent). Their relative ratio in Tskhinvali, the capital of Southern Ossetia, was approximately the same. It is worth noting that the great bulk of the Ossetians live in Northern Ossetia in the northern Caucasus, which constitutes part of the Russian Federation. According to the national census, there were 335,000 of them there in 1989 (Birch 1996: 160).

During recent centuries, the Ossetians lived in Southern Ossetia in close contact with the Georgians and were strongly affected by their culture. Mixed Ossetian-Georgian marriages were fairly common in eastern Georgia. Before the revolution of 1917, Georgian was the only language of literacy in Southern Ossetia. It was the language of instruction in schools for the South Ossetian elite, and all South Ossetian literature was composed in Georgian. Georgian-Ossetian contacts began to be especially close beginning in the 17th – 18th centuries, when the Ossetians descended from the hills and occupied fertile southern lowlands. At that time, the Georgian landlords welcomed the newcomers, who provided them with a source of extra labor (Gamkrelidze 1994: 171-173). In 1801, the South Ossetians joined the Russian Empire as part of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom. After that, they were administratively connected with Tiflis Province, i.e. had close links with Georgia, whereas the North Ossetians were an integral part of Russia. In contrast, in the Ossetian view of the past, which is advocated by the contemporary South Ossetian leader, T. Kulumbegov, Ossetia as a whole joined the Russian Empire in 1774, i.e. before it had been divided into two parts. This view was manifested, in particular, in an appeal of the Supreme Soviet of Southern Ossetia, adopted on May 10, 1992 (the author's archive). In fact, the name "Ossetia" was first recorded on the map of Georgia only at the beginning of the 19th century, and it was acknowledged by Russian officials especially after 1842, when the Ossetian Region

was established in the northern part of Tiflis Province (Gvasalia 1989: 2, 1990b: 35; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 16-19, 229-248).

In the 19th century, the South Ossetian region was one of the most backward in the Caucasus. Its residents suffered severe oppression by the local landlords and revolted against them from time to time. In 1918, the political environment changed radically for the Ossetians. After the Democratic Republic of Georgia was established in May 1918, the South Ossetians found themselves isolated from their northern relatives by the state boundary along the Great Caucasian Ridge. Thus, they had to deal alone with a Georgian democratic government that was not inclined to address the problems of ethnic minorities. In 1919, the Georgian Socialists (Men'sheviks) dissolved the People's Soviet of Southern Ossetia, consisting mainly of Bolsheviks. Supported by North Ossetian Bolsheviks, the South Ossetian peasants rose against independent Georgia. Several times they were severely punished for rebellion. The Ossetians especially recall the revolt of 1920, when Southern Ossetia for the first time made a motion to separate from Georgia and join Soviet Russia. The revolt was cruelly suppressed. About 5,000 Ossetians lost their lives and 20,000 South Ossetians fled to the north. This massacre, arranged by the Men'shevik government, remains an injury in Ossetian social memory. The South Ossetians view it as genocide, and this slogan was exploited by the South Ossetian leaders in their anti-Georgian propaganda at the turn of the 1990s (for example, see Chochiev n.d.: 4, 13. For this, see Birch 1996: 155-157, 162-163). In response, Georgian authors argue that the Georgians never used force against the Ossetians as an ethnic group. They maintain that, in 1918-1920, repression was aimed not at them but at "political extremists" who strove to destroy independent Georgia, which was legally defending its freedom (Toidze 1990; Totadze 1994: 54; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 8-9). Indeed, society was crosscut along political rather than ethnic lines at that time. Ossetian and Georgian-born people acted on both sides of the dividing line (Toidze 1990; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 275-276). Yet, such an important document as the Declaration of the Committee for the Study of the South Ossetian Region's Status recognizes that the ethnic dimension played a significant role in the revolt of 1920 (Shengelaia 1991: 12).

Anyway, when the Red Army entered Georgia in February 1921, it was enthusiastically met by the Ossetians as a true savior. Yet, Ossetian hopes for the establishment of a united republic have never born fruit. First, the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (SOAR) was established on April 20, 1922, in the north of central Georgia, which was followed by the North Ossetian Autonomous Region within the Russian Federation on July 7, 1924¹⁾. In May 1925, the Ossetian delegation attempted to carry on negotiations with the Soviet central authorities for the unification of all Ossetians within the same administrative unit, but without any positive results (for that, see Shengelaia 1991: 73-78). The separation of the Ossetians was approved by the new Soviet Constitution of 1936. The latter upgraded the status of the north Ossetians, who were granted Autonomous Republic status. The Abkhazians and the Ajars also had Autonomous Republics in Georgia,

and only the South Ossetians had to live with a lower political status. The introduction of a strict administrative border caused the rapid growth of cultural differences between North and South Ossetians. The former underwent gradual Russification, whereas the latter were moved toward Georgianization (Birch 1996: 158-159). In the Soviet era, Southern Ossetia was the arena for the struggle between the Georgians and the Russians for cultural influence. In 1938-1953, first, the Georgian alphabet was introduced there, and then all Ossetian schools were closed. Later on, during the thaw, they restored the alphabet based on the Cyrillic script. However, in order to receive advanced professional training in Georgia, one had to be fluent in Georgian. The South Ossetian elite continued to be greatly affected by Georgian language and culture (Birch 1996: 161).

The South Ossetians also complained of poor financial support, industrial backwardness, a less-developed social sphere, and a lower living standard, in contrast to the rest of Georgia. In fact, wages and the provision of industrial goods were one hundred times lower in SOAR than in the rest of Georgia. At the same time, the infant mortality rate was much higher. The Ossetians blamed these facts on the policies of Georgian authorities (Cheremin 1991; Khostikoeva 1991; Birch 1996: 163).

That is why, from as early as 1925, Ossetians kept addressing the federal authorities with requests to unite North and South Ossetia (Perechen' 1989: 164). Initially, it seemed sufficient for the South Ossetians to receive the status of an Autonomous Republic within the Georgian SSR. Since the 1950s – 1960s, anti-Georgian sentiment has grown among South Ossetians, who have manifested the aspiration to join the Russian Federation. The same period marks the time that discrimination against ethnic minorities in the USSR began to be discussed in Ossetian literature. Finally, on the eve of the dissolution of the USSR, the Ossetians began to clamor for the establishment of a separate Ossetian SSR (for details, see Shengelaia 1991: 73-83; Perechen' 1989: 164).

Georgian scholars recognized that in terms of standard of living the SOAR was backward relative to the rest of Georgia, but explained that with reference to the idea that it was less urban and that rural inhabitants predominated there. Yet, they pointed out that, from the 19th century, a lot had been done to promote the Ossetian language and culture in Georgia. A Pedagogical Institute, an Institute for the Higher Education of Schoolteachers and many other schools had been established in Tskhinvali to achieve this goal. There were ninety schools in the SOAR with Ossetian as the language of instruction. The SOAR enjoyed one of the largest groups of intellectually elite people in the USSR and a Research Institute, a regional theater and a few museums had been built there. Georgian authors emphasized that the Ossetians outnumbered the Georgians in both the Party and the Soviet structures of the SOAR, that all the local cultural institutions were run by Ossetians, and that Ossetian managers predominated in commerce and services. Georgians represented the local situation as though Georgian culture was intentionally persecuted and there was encroachment upon Georgian historical

monuments in South Ossetia. They also complained that the Georgians had become an ethnic minority in the SOAR, were being discriminated against and even forced out. Beginning in 1989, the Georgian media treated the SOAR as an “artificial illegal formation” (Gotsiridze 1989; Press-tsentr 1991; Zaiavlenie 1991; Lomouri 1991: 4; Obrashchenie-1 1991; Bochorishvili 1991; Apakidze 1991; Shengelaia 1991: 110-112). In order to justify this stance, President Gamsakhurdia gave a special address to the Georgian Parliament in December 1990. He spoke about ethnocratic Ossetian rule and discrimination against Georgians in the SOAR. In later official speeches, he returned to this formula, which was picked up by many other Georgians as well (Gamsakhurdia 1991d; Gagnidze 1991; Totadze 1994: 59-63; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 339-341; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 10-13. For that, see Cheremin 1991; Birch 1996: 163-164).

Meanwhile, the pattern observed in the SOAR was fairly characteristic of many other ethnic regions in the USSR, where education demonstrated impressive progress. This contrasted with the socio-economic sphere, which was developing much more slowly. As a result, a large number of well-trained intellectuals suffered from the poorly developed infrastructure, which was unable to meet their growing social and cultural demands. This caused frustration, dissatisfaction with the policies of the authorities and an aspiration to radically improve the situation by revolutionary means. Actually, this pattern of cause-and-effect is well known to those who study the problems of the colonial world (for example, see Benda 1962; Horowitz 1985). Yet, the Georgians explained the growth of Georgian-Ossetian tensions simply with reference to the “artificial establishment of the SOAR”, which had to be erased from the map of contemporary Georgia (Gotsiridze 1989; Gurchiani 1991; Khakhutashvili, Shamiladze 1991; Tsereteli 1991; Totadze 1994: 53; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 7-10).

This argument proved to be a crucial one in the Georgian media from the fall of 1990. After the Supreme Soviet of Georgia decided to abolish the SOAR, the term “South Ossetia” was used by Georgian authors, but only with the pejorative epithet “so-called”. The Georgians began to replace it with the term “Shida Kartli” (“Inland Kartli”) or the obsolete medieval names of “Zena Sopeli” and “Samachablo”. This approach was supported by the weight of approval of the Georgian President, the patriarch of the Georgian Church and outstanding Georgian intellectuals (Gamsakhurdia 1991d, 1991e; Zaridze 1991; Ilia II 1991; Gvasalia 1989: 3; Kharadze et al. 1991; Apakidze et al. 1991; Shengelaia 1991: 5-7, 107). This approach was unacceptable to the Ossetians and made them angry (Abaev 1992; Gagloiti 1993). The leading South Ossetian historian, a former rector of the Tskhinvali Pedagogical Institute, Yu. S. Gagloiti, found it necessary to publish a special booklet to show that the term “South Ossetia” was by no means a Bolshevik invention, that it was commonly used in official documents, the mass media and even Georgian historiography of the late 19th – very early 20th centuries. He found evidence that the term “Ossetia” was used for certain areas of northern Georgia even a century earlier (Gagloiti 1993). Certain Georgian authors also agreed that the

terms “Shida Kartli” and “Samachablo” were sometimes used incorrectly by contemporary authors. Yet, they suggested the introduction of new terms like the “northern sector of Central Georgia” or, say, just “northern Georgia” rather than restoring the term “South Ossetia” (Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 12-13).

Following Gamsakhurdia, all the Georgian propaganda disseminated the argument that ethnic minority rights had never been damaged in Georgia. They said that the federal structure caused the ethnic tensions, and that the achievement of independence and the establishment of a very centralized Georgian state was the best guarantee against ethnic conflicts in Georgia (Press-tsentr 1991; Akhalkatsi, Alashvili 1991; Gagnidze 1991; Muskhelishvili 1991). It is worth noting that the Georgian stance was shared by those Ossetians who lived in Georgia outside the SOAR and who had every reason to fear for both their lives and welfare in the existing very tense environment (Otkrytoe pis'mo 1989; Obrashchenie-2 1991; Obrashchenie-3 1991; My protestuem 1991). It is quite probable that the Georgian authorities initiated all the pro-Georgian declarations of those Ossetians.

In the South Ossetians' view, their conflict with the Georgians started in November 1988 when the Georgian Parliament passed laws intending to isolate Georgia from the USSR. These were the laws on the privileges of the Georgian language, the right to hinder the implementation of all-Soviet legislation, etc. Since that time an extensive and aggressive nationalist campaign was launched in the Georgian media, including the slogan “Georgia for the Georgians” and other appeals that were threatening to ethnic minorities. At that time the future Georgian President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, began to talk openly of “illegal autonomies” in Georgian territory and to scare the ethnic minorities with talk of forcing them out of “illegally occupied lands”. The South Ossetians were very alarmed (Chochiev n.d.: 12, 19), and in March 1989 the then leader of the National Front of the South Ossetians, “Adamon Nykhas”, a lecturer at the South Ossetian State Pedagogical Institute, Alan Chochiev, wrote an open letter to the Abkhazian people. In this letter he not only expressed his solidarity with the Abkhazians but also proposed upgrading the SOAR's status and its inclusion in the Russian Federation (Cheremin 1991; Birch 1996: 161-162, 164, 168-169)². Indeed, Chochiev was aware that, if the SOAR was abolished, the South Ossetians would lose their access both to power and land. It would lose the former because, under democratic elections, the Georgian Parliament and all the central and local power structures would be dominated by Georgians, and the latter because, considering the South Ossetians “guests” and “newcomers”, the Georgians would never let them enjoy land ownership. He was also well aware of the importance of historiographic discourse concerning remote ancestors and their genuine territory to the solution of the land issue (Chochiev n.d.: 38, 39).

In 1990, it became clear that Georgia was rapidly moving toward independence. One of the strongest indicators of that was the “Law on Georgian language development”, which introduced the Georgian language as the language of instruction in all schools throughout Georgia, and also made it the major

language of the bureaucracy. Yet, this route to democracy failed to avoid chauvinism and even racism. Calls sounded in the Georgian media to restore "Greater Georgia" to the boundaries of the 12th century, and in June 1990, Gamsakhurdia declared mixed marriages a threat to the Georgian nation. Somewhat later, after he had been elected Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet in democratic elections in October 1990, he articulated his generous agreement to acknowledge the Ossetian right to establish their own independent state but ... in their "historic homeland", i.e. in Northern Ossetia. The South Ossetians were offered only cultural autonomy (Cheremin 1991; Birch 1996: 165-167, 1999: 503-504).

The South Ossetians were quite alarmed and indignant about these developments. They became more persistent in their demands for the unification of North and South Ossetia, and for the right to join the Russian Federation. On September 20, 1990, the SOAR Regional Soviet of People's Deputies passed the declaration "On the sovereignty of Southern Ossetia", which transformed the SOAR into the "South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic". On the next day, the Presidium of the Georgian Supreme Soviet denounced this decree as illegal. Yet, the South Ossetians elected an Executive Committee of the South Ossetian Republic and arranged to elect delegates to a new Supreme Soviet on December 9. Seventy-one percent of the total SOAR population took part in these elections. On December 11, the Supreme Soviet of the South Ossetian Republic held its first session, and at the same day the SOAR was abolished by the Georgian Supreme Soviet. Georgian scholars were ordered to confirm the legitimacy of this act with historical and legal arguments. The Committee for the Study of the South Ossetian Region's Status was established toward that end. It included not only historians and specialists in law, but also writers and cultural activists (sic! V. Sh.). The Committee's studies were based on the research of Georgian scholars alone. The South Ossetian specialists (N. Dzhussoity and B. Tekhov), who were appointed as Committee members, boycotted its activity, for they had every reason to doubt its ability and willingness to respect the Ossetian view. Indeed, the Committee's activity resulted in the rushed publication of a book entitled "On the history of the relationships between the Georgian and Ossetian peoples", which confirmed the Georgian Supreme Soviet's decision to abolish the SOAR (Tsereteli 1991; Shengelaia 1991). A South Ossetian scholar immediately condemned the book as a scholarly waste with obvious political connotations (Gagloiti 1993: 3, 6).

Meanwhile, ethnic tensions were growing. On December 12, three Georgians, including Gamsakhurdia's bodyguard, were killed with a sub-machine gun in the center of Tskhinvali. The Georgian media immediately ascribed this murder to the Ossetian extremists. A state of emergency was introduced both in Tskhinvali and in the Dzhava region, where the most of the Ossetians lived. On December 12, Georgian informal organizations commenced a blockade of Tskhinvali. The next day, the Supreme Soviet of Southern Ossetia responded with the suspension of all Georgian laws that were not in accord with USSR legislation. This was met in

Tbilisi by an order to disband all the Soviet and Party structures in Southern Ossetia. In very early January 1991, Georgian police as well as informal detachments, including many criminals, were brought to Tskhinvali. Plunder commenced both in Tskhinvali and in the adjacent villages. Since the Soviet police avoided intervening, the Ossetians began to organize their own self-defense and to resist the attacks. After that, Georgian forces left Tskhinvali. On January 7, the USSR President, M. S. Gorbachev, finally decided to intervene and declared all legislative acts adopted both in Georgia and in South Ossetia in December 1990 without effect. This added more fuel to the confrontation within Georgia. On March 17, 1991, the South Ossetians took part in the all-Union referendum on the maintenance of the USSR, whereas the Georgians boycotted it. Instead, on March 31, Georgia held its own referendum on independence and declared its independence on April 9.

All these events inspired the South Ossetians to new political acts. Twice, in May and in November 1991, Southern Ossetia adopted decisions to join the Russian Federation. On January 19, 1992, this was discussed at a local referendum, and 97 percent of the participants expressed their assent to that proposal. On their side, the Georgian authorities saw the referendum as an illegal encroachment upon Georgian territorial integrity (Cheremin 1991; Birch 1996: 179-182; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 14-17). Russia proved to be unprepared for this decision and found itself in a fairly ambiguous position (Pain, Popov 1992). Even a noted Ossetian patriot, the outstanding linguist and folklorist, V. I. Abaev, recognized the results of the referendum as a "violation of Georgian territorial integrity" (Abaev 1992).

This development took place against the background of the Georgian-Ossetian armed confrontation and a state of emergency. Both sides suffered heavy losses in 1991-1992. Hundreds of people were killed, and tens of thousands had to search for refuge elsewhere. The South Ossetians viewed the Georgian armed attacks as a clear intention to carry out ethnic cleansing and to force them out to Northern Ossetia. President Gamsakhurdia confirmed the validity of these alarms in interviews given at the beginning of 1991. He called the Ossetians "occupants" and approved their resettlement outside Georgia (Birch 1996: 185-186).

At the meantime, Southern Ossetia did not submit and stuck to its status as a republic, although without ever having been recognized as such by Georgia. The Georgian-Ossetian negotiations at the end of 1994 made no progress with respect to Southern Ossetia's political status (Birch 1999: 509). In September 1996, Southern Ossetia's Parliament brought into force a new Constitution, declaring Southern Ossetia a Presidential Republic. No article mentioned its incorporation in Georgia. They still have hopes in Southern Ossetia of unification with Russia. It is Russia rather than Georgia that provides the unrecognized republic with financial support (Segodnia, November 1, 1996; Birch 1999: 507; Nezavisimaia Gazeta, June 9, 2001). Presidential elections took place in Southern Ossetia on November 10, 1996. The new President, the ethnographer L. Chibirov, the former Chairman of the SOAR Supreme Soviet, is more inclined to carry out opportunistic policies than his

less fortunate opponent, who was stuck to the immediate break away from Georgia and unification with Northern Ossetia (Moskovskii Komsomolets, November 12, 1996; Birch 1999: 509). In the meantime, some steps towards integration with Northern Ossetia had already been taken before the presidential elections. A treaty of co-operation was signed, which relaxed customs controls, announced banking integration, and the like (Moskovskii Komsomolets, November 17, 1996). In his speech in the Southern Ossetian Parliament in March 1998, Chibirov confirmed their plan of pursuing integration with Northern Ossetia, and in May, the Parliament approved a republican crest that looked very similar to that of Northern Ossetia. Yet, the contemporary Northern Ossetian authorities suggest another solution, namely the building up of a federal state in Georgia (Birch 1999: 511-512).

CHAPTER 2

SCYTHIOMANIA

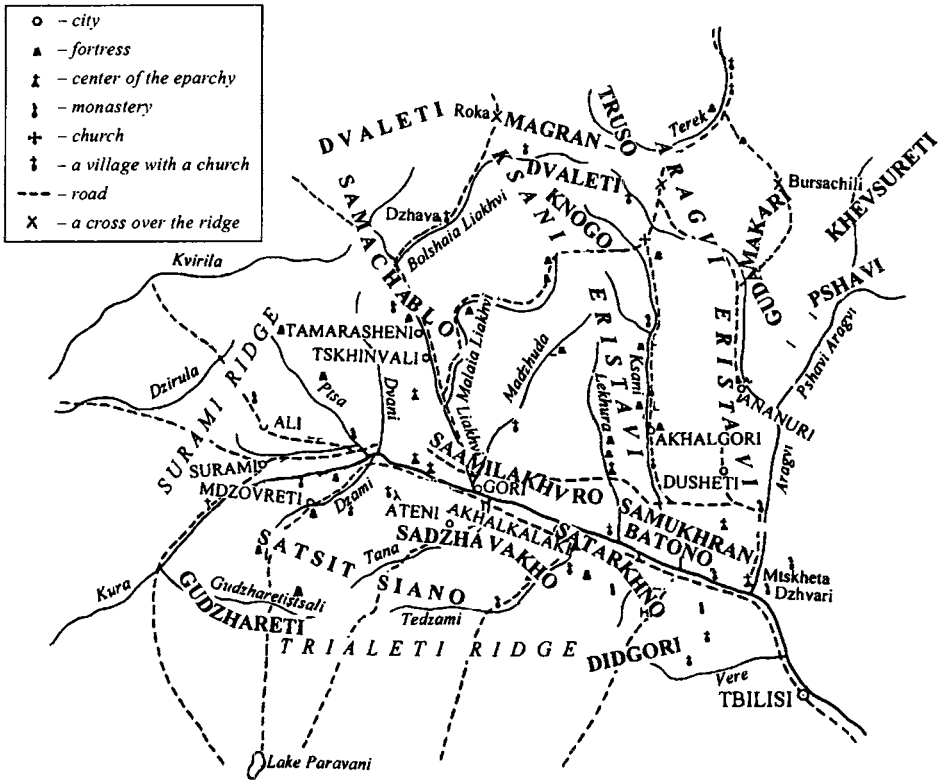
The Ossetian people were formed from the mixing of nomadic Iranian-speaking Alans who arrived from the Eurasian steppes with local highlanders from the central Caucasus. In archaeological terms, the former are traced through early medieval settlements and graveyards on the north Caucasian slopes, and the latter are represented by the Koban' culture of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. In the 10th century A.D., the Alans established their own state, which was the most powerful one in the northern Caucasus in the pre-Mongol period. However, they suffered a heavy blow from the Mongols, and had to leave their fertile lowlands and hilly flanks to search for refuge in the highland gorges. There they mingled with the highlanders and gave birth to the Ossetian people. In the course of the mass migration caused by the Mongol conquest, certain Alan groups began to cross the Great Caucasian Ridge and infiltrate Transcaucasia. Some of them settled there and composed the basis for formation of the South Ossetians as a distinct group of Ossetian people (Abaev 1967; Cherdzhiev 1967; Kuznetsov 1975, 1989, 1992).

This is a general overview of the Ossetian origins, the formation of their territory, and the arrival of the South Ossetians in Transcaucasia. At the same time, the aspiration to reconstruct a more detailed pattern excites sharp discussions among scholars, because many important issues are still unclear. What are the relationships between the Alan and local languages, on the one hand, and the cultural heritage of the Ossetians, on the other? How many times and under what particular circumstances did the Alans try to open up the Caucasian highlands? When did they begin to settle permanently in northern Georgia and who lived there before them? It is by no means easy to identify the early medieval archaeological materials from the central part of the Caucasus in ethnic terms, and frequently archaeologists disagree with each other with respect to the identification of particular Alan findings. It is also unclear whether the Alans should be considered a distinct homogeneous cultural and linguistic group or if they constituted a heterogeneous tribal alliance instead, which embraced groups of very different origins. Specialists have discussed these and many other fascinating issues concerning the Alans and their unique history for decades. The hot issue of which particular cultural groups played the crucial roles in Ossetian ethnogenesis is still open (for example, see Abaev 1967; Krupnov 1967; Gagloiti 1966a: 41-47; Tekhov 1995; Kuznetsov 1989, 1994, 1996).

In the meantime, developments over the last 15 years or so demonstrate perfectly well that these problems by no means attract only scholars, and that hot discussions of them are not restricted to peaceful scholarly conferences and academic meetings. Even South Ossetian authors themselves recognize the big role of ideological struggle based on views of the past in the escalation of ethnic conflict. One of them put it the following way: “Disagreement over the true state of affairs on the part of contemporary leading historians, and their suppression or distortion of the truth, have resulted in dramatic uneasiness between our peoples (the Georgians and the South Ossetians. V. Sh.)” (Chichinadze 1993: 14). What is the “historical truth” as seen by Georgian and Ossetian authors?

The SOAR was established by the Bolsheviks in 1922 in the territory of Shida Kartli, a historical province of Georgia. Georgian authors argue that it was granted to the Ossetians in return for their assistance in the struggle against the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Moreover, they believe that this was the way Soviet power tried to oppose the Georgians and the Ossetians to each other and to provoke ethnic tensions (for example, see Lomouri 1991: 4; Ilia II 1991; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1991a: 3; Khakhutashvili, Shamiladze 1991; Tuskia 1992: 395; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 87, 248; Zhorzholiani, et al. 1995: 9-10)³). Georgian authors view this development as the connivance of the local separatist forces for, they say, the territory in question never enjoyed the status of a distinct administrative unit, let alone a principality, before the Soviet era (Lomouri 1991; Zaridze 1991; Bochorishvili 1991. For that, see Goldenberg 1994: 105). True, at the very beginning of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, the Georgian historian, G. Gvasalia, reminded people that already in the 19th century the Ossetian administrative unit (*Osetinskii okrug*) had been established. Yet, he also emphasized that there was never any Ossetian state formed in Georgian territory during the centuries of Georgian state development (Gvasalia 1989, 1990a, 1990b: 35-39, 1991b) (map 22). In later years, Georgian authors did not recall the Ossetian okrug at all.

According to the Georgian view, Georgians were the original native inhabitants of the region, whereas the Ossetian ancestors, the Alans, lived north of the Great Caucasian Ridge. The Ossetians should search there for their homeland. Therefore, the Georgian authors unanimously identified the South Ossetians as newcomers, non-indigenous residents. For a long time Georgian historiography was based on the belief that the first permanent Ossetian settlements were only established in the 13th century in the north Georgian highlands, when Iranian-speaking highlanders, forced out of the north, began to cross the Great Caucasian Ridge and settle throughout the gorges, expelling the native inhabitants out of those areas as they came (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 248-249; Lazarashvili 1966; Togoshvili 1983). However, recently, Georgian authors have pointed out that, at that time, the Ossetians were strongly repulsed by the Georgian King, Giorgi V the Bright. The first substantial Ossetian communities were established in the north Georgian mountains only in the 17th – 18th centuries, they said (Gvasalia 1989, 1990a, 1990b: 30-33, 1991a: 165-166; Lomouri 1991; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1991a, 1993: 84;



Map 22 Shida Kartli in the 16th – 18th centuries (after Gvasalia 1991)

Zaridze 1991; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 79-83, 328; Gamkrelidze 1994: 169-171; Totadze 1994: 44), or in any event no earlier than the 15th – 16th centuries (Tuskia 1992: 400-401). Anyway, the Ossetian population was still less numerous there until the mid-19th century. Mass Ossetian migration was observed only after 1860, when they began to settle in the Kartli lowlands (Totadze 1994: 45-46; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 3-4). To put it other way, contemporary Georgian authors argue that the Ossetians arrived in Shida Kartli only in the 17th -18th centuries or even as late as the 20th century. This view was not only disseminated by the Georgian media (Vasilieva 1993: 45; Dzebisashvili 2000: 152), but also officially approved by the Georgian authorities (Press-tsentr 1991). This concept was the basis for a resolution of the Committee for the Study of the South Ossetian Region’s Status (Shengelaia 1991: 8-11).

While discussing the issue of Ossetian arrival in the northern part of Shida Kartli (Southern Ossetia), Georgian scholars deny any direct continuity between the Ossetians and the Alans, and isolate Alan-Georgian contacts from Ossetian history. At the very least, Georgian authors proceed from the supposition that the Ossetian people developed in the 10th – 12th centuries (Shengelaia 1991: 3; Gamkrelidze

1994: 180) or even in the 16th – 18th centuries as a result of ethnic mixing. They inherited the language of the Iranian nomads and the physical appearance of the local inhabitants. The latter are identified with the bearers of the Koban' culture who, in their turn, are identified by certain Georgian authors with the Kartvelians. Northern Ossetia is considered by all Georgian authors as the Ossetian historical homeland par excellence (Shengelaia 1991: 75; Tuskia 1992: 399-403).

Georgian authors were indignant that, while enjoying political-territorial autonomy in the northern Caucasus, the Ossetians wanted to be granted more autonomy in the territory of Georgia. The Georgians were alarmed about both the political and territorial consequences of that. They felt threatened by the possible loss of a large territory, if the Ossetians decided to unite their autonomous areas. Indeed, the Ossetians persistently manifested this aspiration from as early as 1925 (Gotsiridze 1989; Shengelaia 1991: 73-83, 107-110).

The South Ossetians were mentioned in Georgian history textbooks only with respect to their arrival in northern Georgia. Moreover, while combating the South Ossetians' political claims, the Georgians represented their ancestors as merciless conquerors and plunderers who encroached on genuine Georgian lands and expelled indigenous people from them for centuries (Berdzenishvili et al. 1962: 248-254; Gvasalia 1989: 2, 1991b; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1991a; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 148-149, 209-228). In 1990-1991, Georgian authors avoided any discussion of the Ossetian contribution to the building of the Georgian state and their active participation in its defense from foreign invaders. Moreover, one of the major Georgian historians, D. Muskhelishvili, maintained that the Georgian state was the result of the activities of only one people, namely the Georgians (Muskhelishvili 1991). A propaganda book published in Georgia in 1994 read: "... if anybody created or built [anything], they were... the Georgians. The Ossetian born people only used to destroy and devastate the country" (Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 111. Also see Gamkrelidze 1994: 174-176). Thus, all non-Georgian residents of Georgia had to be content with the role of a speechless passive crowd, or newcomers, or "guests".

Nowadays, Georgian authors refuse to use the term "South Ossetia" at all. Instead, they call the region Shida Kartli, or sometimes Samochablo (after the late medieval polity). It is represented as "one of the earliest centers of the material and intellectual culture of the Georgian people – an inalienable part of Georgia", "the heart of Georgia" where the cradle of the Georgian ethnos was located, the earliest Georgian state was established, and later on the all-Georgian monarchy has formed. The Ossetian homeland is located in the northern Caucasus (Gvasalia 1991b; Ilia II 1991; Khakhutashvili, Shamiladze 1991; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 146-147; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 3). While bearing this intense discourse in mind, it seems no accident that it was only at the beginning of 1991 that the "Georgian Encyclopedia" Publishing House published the first volume of its fundamental series "A collection of historical and cultural monuments in Georgia". The volume focused on Shida Kartli, and with reference to the latter, certain Georgian authors

maintained that “everything found by archaeologists in the ground of so-called ‘Southern Ossetia’, and everything that was recorded in its territory by art historians was only Georgian in nature!” (Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 89). They argued that there were no Ossetian historical monuments there at all. Instead, almost all the historic place names were based on the Georgian language. However, the Georgian authors complained, these place names were often illegally encroached upon by the Ossetians (Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 151-168). They claimed that, according to archaeological data, Tskhinvali was a Georgian city from the very beginning until the 1920s (Totadze 1994: 48-50; Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 26, 110; Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 10, 13)⁴.

Georgian authors do their best to employ archaeological, historical, toponymic and other arguments to support the political conclusion that the “Ossetian population of Georgia, by contrast to the indigenous inhabitants of the autonomous regions and republics of the Russian Federation, constitutes an ethnic minority living in the territory of a foreign state, rather than in its own historical homeland. According to well-recognized international legal principles and norms they do not fall under international law” (Zhorzholiani et al. 1995: 17-18). Thus, they justified the severe verdict brought against the SOAR. “It was established in 1922 without any legal grounds” and was granted even more privileges than it deserved, according to its status (Shengelaia 1991: 98, 101-102).

Obviously, all this was unlikely to satisfy the South Ossetians, as it deprived them of their autochthonous status and, thus, made them entirely dependent on the Georgian authorities’ will. Therefore, certain South Ossetian historians have been working for several decades to find evidence that deepens the Ossetians’ roots in Transcaucasia and proves that there were no Georgian ancestors in Southern Ossetia before the Ossetian ancestors’ arrival there.

Zakharii N. Vaneev (1888-1963), one of the founders of Ossetian historiography, was the first Ossetian who went deeper into this issue. He lived an extremely dynamic life. He was born into a peasant family in the Gori region of Tiflis Province, and his early life did not differ much from those of other intellectuals not of gentle birth. After graduation from theological college, he worked for some time as a schoolteacher. Then he became a student at the Kiev Commercial Institute. Having come back to his Motherland, he took an active part in the establishment of the first gymnasium in Tskhinvali in 1918, and taught history and geography there. In 1920, he fled to Vladikavkaz, in order to escape persecution by the Georgian authorities. There he wrote articles for Bolshevik newspapers aimed at unmasking the Georgian nationalist policy, which did not tolerate ethnic minorities. He returned to Tskhinvali with the Red Army. Being one of the few well-trained intellectuals there, he had good careers successively as chairman of the Economic Soviet (Sovnarkhoz), the head of the Committee for Agriculture (Narkomzem), and, then head of the Committee for Public Education (Narkompros). In 1929-1935, he worked in the SOAR regional government.

Yet he was not satisfied with a Soviet bureaucratic career. He was more

attracted to an intellectual life, and established the Scholarly-Literary Society in Tskhinvali. The Research Institute of Local Studies was formed on the foundation of that Society in 1927. Vaneev then ran it from 1941 to 1943. Then, in 1944, this Institute was reorganized as the South-Ossetian Research Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR and it became the main center of scholarly activity in Southern Ossetia. Vaneev chaired the Department of History and Ethnography there. Simultaneously, he was director of the South Ossetian State Pedagogical Institute, established in 1932. He regularly gave a course in history there between 1935 and 1950. In 1946, Vaneev defended his Candidate in History thesis on the history of the Alans, and ten years later, he defended his Doctor of History thesis on the issue of peasants in Ossetia in the 19th – 20th centuries (Pamiati 1963; Vaneev 1989: 3-5).

Being the first South Ossetian historian, Vaneev had to cover various issues, from prehistory to modern times. Yet he was mostly attracted by the study of the origins of the Ossetian people, and he wrote quite a number of articles about that. One of his first scholarly publications of the 1930s dealt with the arrival of the Ossetians in Southern Ossetia. The issue was still little studied in those days. There was only a little historical evidence of the Ossetians' arrival south of the Great Caucasian Ridge, and it was possible to interpret it differently. Regular archaeological studies had just commenced there in the 1920s, and the first Soviet researchers believed that the Iranian-speaking Ossetian ancestors were forced out of the north Caucasian lowlands initially by the Khazars, and then by the following Turkic invasions. Having crossed the ridge, they came in contact with some local Nakh-speaking tribes, mixed with them and thus became the foundation of the contemporary South Ossetian people. It was also emphasized that some Georgian tribes lived there as well, at the time of the Ossetian ancestors' arrival (Pchelina 1925: 237-238; Melikset-Bekov 1925).

This was the scholars' view of the problem at the time Vaneev came to grips with it. In fact, his article only presented an overview of various approaches to the problem by classical writers and intellectuals of the 19th century. He did all his best to bring together many pieces of fragmented data about the Ossetian arrival into Transcaucasia. His information was often borrowed from secondary sources. He did not make any attempt to verify the reviewed materials, and the data he collected were quite variable in reliability. For example, he referred uncritically to J. Saint-Martin, a French traveler of the early 19th century, who believed that the Ossetians arrived in Transcaucasia in 215 B.C. He also maintained that St. Nino baptized the South Ossetians in the 4th century. He unreservedly identified the Dvals, highlanders who lived in the territory of Southern Ossetia in earlier times, with the Ossetians, and so on. The latter conclusion led him to identify Southern Ossetia with Dvaleti (Vaneti 1936). From that time, in order to avoid using the Georgian name Shida Kartli, South Ossetian authors often used the name Dvaleti, instead.

Two ideas were at the core of Vaneev's article. First, the Ossetians resettled in northern Georgia many times, starting in the 1st Millennium B.C. Second, the

South Ossetian ancestors arrived where their descendants live nowadays in the 15th – 16th centuries in search of refuge, first from the Mongols and then from the Kabardinians. Although they arrived there relatively late, the identification of their predecessors, the Dvals, with other Ossetians who arrived earlier made it possible to view Southern Ossetia as the region where Ossetians had lived almost from time immemorial. In any case, Vaneev did his best to cleanse Southern Ossetia of any early Georgian population. Despite the great methodological poverty of the article, compiled from many unverified hypotheses, through his life Vaneev strove to confirm its main points, which are the basis of contemporary South Ossetian historiography.

Vaneev himself was stuck to this methodological approach. He kept looking through the vast scholarly literature in order to collect everything that might be used as an argument for deep roots of an Iranian-speaking population in Transcaucasia. He built the glorious history of the earliest Ossetian ancestors on this basis.

While referring to the established linguistic and cultural continuity between the Ossetians and the ancient Iranian-speaking nomads of the Eurasian steppes (the Scythians, the Sarmatians and especially the Alans), Vaneev sought to trace their migrations to Transcaucasia during the Early Iron Age. The Cimmerians and the Scythians crossed Transcaucasia from north to south in the 8th – 7th centuries B.C., and traces of the Scythian culture can still be found in south Ossetia and some other areas of Georgia (Vaneev 1989: 340-343). The next wave of expansion was identified by Vaneev with the Sarmatians. In his fairly incautious interpretation of classical sources, during some periods Iranian-speakers accounted for the great majority of the highland population of the Caucasus. While saying that, he described the Georgian tribes of the Pshav, Khevsur, and Tushin as North Caucasian highlanders (Vaneev 1989: 346-347). He was especially attracted by the Koban' culture of the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age, the only archaeological culture that covered both northern and southern slopes of the Great Caucasian Ridge. In his view, its bearers might also contribute to the formation of the Ossetians (Vaneev 1989: 140, 337-338).

Being unable to prove the Ossetian identity of the Dvals, Vaneev maintained that "Dvals" was a geographical name devoid of any cultural meaning (Vaneev 1989: 362). Yet, when certain researchers tried to apply the same methodological approach towards the Alans, Vaneev objected to that emphatically and claimed that the Alans constituted a distinct cultural-linguistic unity (Vaneev 1964, 1989: 129-146). He developed the same argument about the Sarmatians and disagreed with the Academician Dzavakhishvili, who attempted to identify them with the North Caucasian highlanders rather than with Iranian-speakers (Vaneev 1989: 113-124).

In his publications, Vaneev argued that the early Iranians brought higher culture to the Caucasus, rather than simply being cruel conquerors and robbers. In his opinion, they made the local inhabitants familiar with iron working (Vaneev 1989: 127). Vaneev also put forward the idea of the local "Alanian Kingdom",

which supposedly emerged even earlier than its Abkhazian counterpart (Vaneev 1989: 140-143). By basing his arguments upon his own interpretation of personal names mentioned in the classical sources, Vaneev claimed to find "Ossetian chiefs" amongst the first Georgian and Abkhazian Princes (sic! V. Sh.) (Vaneev 1989: 351-355). Georgian rulers used to recruit Ossetian noblemen as mercenaries, resulting in the resettlement of Ossetians to Georgia throughout the medieval period (Vaneev 1989: 362). Moreover, in those days the Alans-Ossetians frequently invaded Kartli (Georgia), driven first by the Mongols, then by Timur (Tamerlaine) and finally by the Kabardinians. This was only one part, however, of a much longer process of migration to Transcaucasia (Vaneev 1989: 364). While making no distinctions between the Alans and the Sarmatians, Vaneev argued that the latter settled all over the northern Caucasus and made a great contribution to the formation of many local peoples besides the Ossetians (Vaneev 1989: 127-128, 131-132). He insisted that it was the Alan-Sarmatian newcomers who assimilated and Iranized the local population in the central-northern Caucasus rather than vice-versa. In his view, this process was complete by the 1st century A.D. In other words, the Ossetians were the direct descendants of the Alan migrants rather than Iranized natives (Vaneev 1989: 133-134, 139, 145-146).

In fact, Vaneev intentionally did not distinguish between the Ossetians, on the one hand, and the Alans and the Sarmatians, on the other hand. This approach let him provide the Ossetians with much deeper roots in the past. In brief, Vaneev for his whole life was true to his convictions of the mid-1930s. He never tired of arguing that the post-Mongolian Ossetian migration southward by no means marked the beginning of their resettlements there. Instead, that was only a new stage in their long and continuous migration process. The birth of the new ethnic name, "Ossetians", was by no means evidence of population replacement. No, he said, they were the same medieval Alans who received a new name from outside observers (Vaneev 1989: 365).

The methodological principles employed by Vaneev are worth discussing. First, against the common Soviet approach, he refused to recognize any possibility of relying on somatic features. Quite correctly, he pointed to the continuous mixing of the early tribes and their assimilation. These made it impossible for physical anthropologists to discover any dependable pattern. That is why, he explained, the North and South Ossetians differ from each other in their physical appearance (Vaneev 1989: 365-373). Second, he emphatically denied that burial rites serve as a reliable cultural marker (Vaneev 1989: 134-135, 356). Third, he associated ethnicity mostly with language, culture and shared historical heritage (Vaneev 1989: 128, 140)⁵. Thus, while discussing whether natives or migrants played the major role in Ossetian ethnogenesis, Vaneev resolved this problem in favor of the Alans and concluded that the "Alan-Ossetian people (narodnost') were Iranian in language, although they included elements from the Caucasian languages. By origins and culture [they were] genetically linked with the north Iranian tribes, on the one hand, and the indigenous Caucasian population, on the other hand. After these two ethnic

elements merged, the Alans, with their Iranian language, secured their dominant role. It is in this ethnic composition that the Caucasian Alans-Ossetians are visible on the historical scene for about 2,000 years” (Vaneev 1989: 146).

Vaneev’s schema, which was developed in order to “restore justice” to the much-debated problems of Ossetian ethnogenesis, was in obvious contradiction to the Georgian version of the process. It was no accident that Vaneev’s manuscripts, which began addressing these problems in the early 1960s, were first published in Southern Ossetia only in the late 1980s, after the Georgian authorities had lost control over local scholarship. Undoubtedly, Vaneev’s works contributed to the development of the national idea amongst the Southern Ossetians, which itself resulted in, first, the growth of a separatist movement and, finally, in the Georgian-South Ossetian war of 1991-1992 (Hill, Jewett 1993: 95-99).

These works first rehabilitated the territorial claims of the South Ossetians by insisting on their immemorial roots. Second, they reversed traditional stereotypes by arguing that the Ossetians, who had contributed much to the development of Caucasian culture and the formation of many local peoples, were the true “elder brothers” of the Georgians and other Caucasian peoples. Third, they purported to prove that the Alans-Ossetians had enjoyed their own statehood even earlier than the Georgians, thereby legitimizing the recent struggle of the south Ossetians for sovereignty. Last, and arguably most important, it was argued that the Ossetians were the direct descendants of ancient Iranian-speakers rather than simply Iranized natives. This also helped to upgrade the status of the Ossetians since, in folk belief, shifting to another language lowers the status of a group (Shnirelman 1996b).

Vaneev’s arguments were picked up and developed by other South Ossetian authors in recent years. His true follower is the historian Yu. Gagloev (Gagloiti), highly respected in South Ossetia, who was until recently the rector of the South Ossetian State Pedagogical Institute. In the very late 1950s – very early 1960s, he attempted to identify the local Dvals with the Ossetians of pre-Mongol times (Gagloev 1959; Gagloiti 1966b: 193-194). However, Georgian scholars convincingly objected to this identification. Instead, they demonstrated that the Dvals should be identified with what remained of the north Caucasian natives of pre-Iranian times (Gamrekeli 1961; Lazarashvili 1966: 102) who were assimilated partly by the Georgians and partly by the Ossetians (Gvasalia 1989: 3; 1990b: 38). True, recently certain Georgian authors have gone much further and argued that the Dvals were the early Georgians (Dzabisashvili 2000: 153). At the same time, there is also reason to believe that the Dvals were assimilated by the Ossetians alone, and that the Ossetian population occupied Dvaleti as early as the turn of the 13th century (Kuznetsov 1986, 1992: 184-185). That is why Gagloiti kept identifying the Dvals with the Ossetians (Gabaraev 1969: 54; Gagloiti 1994).

Yet, the idea of the early presence of Iranian-speaking Scythians and Sarmatians in the Caucasus seemed to be more the perspective of Ossetian scholars. This idea is persistently included by South Ossetian authors in the school textbooks on the history of the Motherland (for example, see Gabaraev 1969: 21-26). In

particular, this subject was strongly emphasized by Gagloiti in his chapter on South Ossetian origins completed for the first textbook on the history of South Ossetia. He maintained that the Ossetian language had been brought to the Caucasus first due to the arrival of the Scythians, and then the Alans. He referred to archaeological findings that proved the Scythian and Sarmatian presence in the northern Caucasus, and concluded that the “Alans [were] the direct ancestors of the contemporary Ossetians” and that the “Ossetians were the direct descendants of the Sarmatians through the Alans”. As the most convincing argument in favor of that, the Ossetians refer to a medieval pre-Mongol inscription found at the Zelenchuk River in the Upper Kuban’ River region in the late 19th century. All the experts unanimously agree that the inscription should be read in the Ossetian language. Further on, Gagloiti argued that the name “Alans” was associated with the Ossetian ancestors alone, and disagreed with those who assumed that the Alan tribal alliance might be heterogeneous in nature. At the same time, he recognized the role of the Caucasian sub-stratum in Ossetian ethnogenesis, pointed to its various aspects (language sub-stratum, folklore, elements of the material culture, etc.) and came to the conclusion that the Ossetians were a “Caucasian people”. He associated this sub-stratum with the Koban’ archaeological culture. At the same time, in his view, language was the major ethnic marker. That is why, he reasoned, the Iranian-speaking Scythians and the Sarmatians played the major role in Ossetian ethnogenesis (Gabaraev 1969: 27-47). Thus, this approach helped both to maintain the glorious Scythian-Sarmatian heritage and to make the Ossetians the indigenous population in the Central Caucasus.

Moreover, it helped to extend the history of the Ossetian ancestors much further into the Transcaucasian past, and, following Vaneev, Gagloiti maintained that the Sarmatians lived there in classical and early medieval times, and that the “Sarmatian-Alan” rulers were known to the Colchis and Kartli of that period. Having said that, he insisted that the Ossetians could have resettled in Transcaucasia by the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. Moreover, he pointed out that North Iranian names were known among the Kartli nobility in early medieval times, and argued that the Ossetian population could have lived in highland Kartli as early as the 4th – 5th centuries A.D., as though it was those residents who were called the “Dvals” by early writers. Finally, the Ossetian migration to Transcaucasia in the late 13th century was treated by Gagloiti as the third wave of Iranian-speakers’ migrations (Gabaraev 1969: 48-59).

Already in the 1950s – 1960s the Ossetian authors identified the Ossetians simply with the Alans and did not fail to mention the “Ossetian” presence in Georgia in classical and early medieval times, when they helped the Georgian Kings resist foreign invasions. In the late Soviet era, scholars were obliged to strengthen peoples’ friendship, and the friendly Georgian-Ossetian relationships were emphasized most of all, including their joint struggle against external enemies and their dynastic marriages. Ossetian authors found examples of such mutual support even in the dramatic 13th century and avoided mentioning the Ossetians’

plundering raids into Georgia. Moreover, the policy of the Georgian King, Giorgi V the Bright, was represented as if it was aimed at the integration of the Ossetian newcomers into the Georgian state, to the extent that the basis for future South Ossetia was being established at that time (Abaev 1959: 4-6).

Apparently, despite its outward friendliness, this concept seemed to be too radical for the Georgian authorities. Therefore, the second edition of the textbook on the history of Southern Ossetia was greatly revised. Many of its chapters were rewritten, and the most important one, that dealt with the arrival of the Ossetians in northern Georgia, was completed by professor G. D. Togoshvili (1932-1989), the major Georgian expert on the history of Georgian-Ossetian relationships. In fact, this textbook was the result of compromise. The Ossetian authors kept emphasizing the traces of the Scythian-Sarmatian culture in the territory of Southern Ossetia, though they interpreted them as caused by cultural interactions rather than by migrations. The Ossetian origins were viewed as a complex process of mixing between Iranian-speaking newcomers and local residents. Northern Ossetia was represented as the main site of this mixing, i.e. the Ossetian homeland. The glorious history of the Alans, the Ossetian ancestors, was appreciated, but the area of their great deeds was confined to north Caucasian territory (Tekhov 1985: 28-31, 55-66).

In their turn, the Georgian authors pointed to the early medieval churches with their Georgian inscriptions situated in Southern Ossetia. They mentioned contacts between the Alans and the Iberian Kings, although the Alan origin of the latter was out of the question. Instead, the beneficial influence of the Georgian Church on the Alans was stressed. At the same time, the textbook was straightforward in that Shida Kartli was reported to be occupied by the Georgians and the Dvals in the pre-Mongol period, that the first Ossetian settlements were said to have emerged there only at the very beginning of the 14th century, after which the region witnessed a number of new Ossetian migrations. It was emphasized that, nevertheless, the whole region was under the continuous control of Georgian potentates (Tekhov 1985: 34-41, 67-102). To put it other way, the Ossetians were represented as newcomers in Southern Ossetia who had to obey the Georgian authorities.

The textbook in question had come out when the Georgian authorities had introduced strict control over historical production. Yet, very soon the dramatic perestroika process resulted in the abolition of severe censorship, and the South Ossetians got a chance to display openly their distinct view of local history. The aboriginal status of their remote ancestors proved to be of major importance to the Ossetians, especially in the following years, colored with both bloody ethnic clashes in Southern Ossetia and the Ossetian-Ingush conflict (Gostieva et al. 1996: 121). Nowadays, while bearing in mind the territorial issue, Ossetian scholars not only insist on Iranian-speakers' arriving in the central Caucasian highlands early in the Early Iron Age, but especially emphasize their early penetration to the southern slopes of the Great Caucasian Ridge (Isaenko 1993; Gutnov 1993; Gagloiti 1994; Dzitzzoity 1994; Gagloity 1994; Tekhov 1994b, 1995; Medoiti, Chochiev 1994).

Ossetian authors have demanded the restoration of the "true" history of the

Ossetians, which they identify mainly with the glorious Scythian-Sarmatian and Alan periods, and have stated openly that “only the efforts of nationalist-thinking historians can help restore this history in its entirety” (Chichinadze 1993: 3). In their view, the reason for the miserable conditions of the South Ossetians today lies in “their haphazard attitude toward studies and the representation of the people’s past, that is used to their own profit by our opponents, while they confine us to small plots of land that [are all that] remain to us of our vast former domains” (Chichinadze 1993: 4). Furthermore, they insist that the South Ossetians have never been a part of the Georgian people, and that Southern Ossetia was never previously included in the independent Georgian state. Moreover, it was Southern Ossetia rather than Northern Ossetia that was the historical homeland of the South Ossetians. Therefore, they claim, Georgian attempts to carry out the genocide of the South Ossetians are illegal (Chichinadze 1993: 5).

South Ossetian scholars have attempted to substantiate these statements by using archaeological and linguistic data as well as written documents. At a conference on Ossetian history held in Vladikavkaz in 1994, Yu. Gagloiti tried to prove that the Sarmatians spread all over the southern slopes of the Great Caucasian Ridge in the last centuries B.C., and that the great majority of the “Caucasians” of the central and western Caucasus, mentioned by Strabo, were therefore Iranian-speaking Sarmatians (Gagloiti 1994). Yu. Dzitstsoity put forward the idea of the extraordinary antiquity of some Ossetian dialects. He related the Dzhava dialect to the Scythian language and the Yron dialect to the Sarmatian language. Using such arguments, he concluded that the Scythians, the speakers of the Dzhava dialect, settled in Southern Ossetia as early as the 7th – 6th centuries B.C. On the other hand, the mass migrations southward since the 13th century were carried out by Yron dialect speakers. That is where the development of the modern Tuala and Chisan dialects in Southern Ossetia began (Dzitstsoity 1994).

Finally, in terms of their struggle for historical priority in their own territory, the South Ossetians consider the ethnic identification of the Koban’ archaeological culture (KAC) to be of crucial importance⁶). The culture in question flourished in the central Caucasus between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (15th – 6th centuries B.C.) (Kozenkova 1996). Its close relationships with contemporary sites in the Colchis Lowland are well-attested (Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 133-135, 176-177). Accordingly, a tendency has emerged among Georgian archaeologists to include northern and northwestern areas of Shida Kartli, or Southern Ossetia, to the vast region covered by the Colchian culture (for example, see Lordkipanidze 1979: 39-40; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 133). Since the very end of the 1980s, Georgian archaeologists have given up the term the “Koban’ culture” at all, while considering it inappropriate as the “local version of the Colchis culture”. Therefore, they argue that the early Georgians inhabited all of what is now southern Ossetia, long before the arrival of the Ossetians’ ancestors (Mikeladze 1990: 75-77. See also the map in his book).

The major South Ossetian expert in Koban’ antiquities is B. V. Tekhov, who

discovered and studied a number of very impressive burials in the Tli graveyard. In his childhood, Tekhov lived in the South Ossetian village of Cher, and could not but be affected by the dramatic 20th century socio-political developments in Georgia. For example, he experienced the abolition of the Ossetian schools in 1945, and had to study Georgian instead of Ossetian. After graduation from secondary school, he entered the Philological Faculty of the Tskhinvali Pedagogical Institute, and taught Russian language and literature in a rural school for some time after that. In 1953, he was privileged to become a post-graduate student at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography at the Georgian Academy of Sciences, and after that his professional career was strictly connected with archaeology. In 1974, he defended his Doctor of History thesis, and was granted professorial status in 1981. Between 1978 and 1994, he was the director of the South Ossetian Research Institute in Tskhinvali. In the early 1990s, Tekhov became an involuntary participant in the tragic events in Southern Ossetia. His native village was entirely burned by Georgian fighters. He himself had to flee from Tskhinvali to Vladikavkaz together with his Tli archaeological collection, which he brought with him at the risk of his life.

Thus, Tekhov's name is closely associated with the studies of the remarkable Tli graveyard of the Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages. He started conducting archaeological excavations there in 1955, and was most interested in the ethnic identity of the bearers of the Koban' culture. In his earlier publications he avoided interpreting the obvious cultural similarities between the Koban' and Colchian materials as evidence of any ethnic unity and preferred to talk of cultural contacts (Gabaraev 1969: 17-18). Then, while completing his doctoral thesis in Tbilisi, he was obviously pressed to develop the idea that the KAC was established by the Kartvelians (i.e. the Georgian ancestors) who expanded from the south and mixed with the local north Caucasian inhabitants, whereas the Iranian-speakers came there somewhat later (Tekhov 1977: 192-193, 214).

The growth of inter-ethnic tensions in the Caucasus made Tekhov change his opinion. Since 1987, he has argued that Indo-Europeans and, especially Iranians were the autochthonous inhabitants in the Caucasus, especially in the central region. In order to prove that, he resettled the Hittites in the Caucasus and insisted that they came from there to Asia Minor (Tekhov 1993: 4). Yet, being aware that it was impossible to identify the Hittites with the Iranians, he associated the KAC formation with the Indo-Iranians who came from the North, having brought the practice of horse breeding as well as horse-drawn wheeled vehicles (Tekhov 1994a). While pointing to the numerous Scythian and Sarmatian archaeological sites discovered throughout the Caucasian region, Tekhov concluded: "There has been not any period over the millennia when tribes of Indo-Europeans and the Iranians, bearers of the Iranian language tradition, have not lived in the Caucasus, and, especially in its central region. The migration processes kept going, the nomadic life-style made many tribes leave their native lands, but groups of the Iranian-speaking tribes always stayed in the territory of the central Caucasus, where

they more or less maintained their ethnic features, developed their former traditions, their material and spiritual culture” (Tekhov 1993: 8, 1994b: 8). In fact, he informed us that the language had not changed in the central Caucasian region through the millennia, and that the Koban’ culture bearers were Iranian-speakers (Tekhov 1993: 12-13, 1994b: 13)⁷.

It is unclear what the Hittites and, even more so, Hatti (Tekhov 1993: 9, 1994b: 9) with their non-Iranian languages had to do with all the processes in question. It is also unclear why Tekhov was searching for analogies to his archaeological findings in India rather than in, say, Iran which might be more productive in respect to his hypothesis of the KAC bearers’ Iranian affiliation. Perhaps he was attracted by the Aryan image (for example, see Tekhov 1993: 11, 1994b: 10-11), which was stirring up the emotions of Ossetian intellectuals, including scholars, during the 1990s (for example, see Guriev 1991; Chochiev 1996). In any case, Tekhov was by no means satisfied with the view that the Ossetians developed from the mixing of Iranian-speaking migrants and indigenous inhabitants in the medieval period. In addition, he insisted that if the Alans did mix with somebody else in the northern Caucasus, than with the same Iranian-speakers who lived there long before their arrival. To put it differently, according to Tekhov, “the Ossetian people are the developers of the traditions of the Koban’ culture bearers, their heirs, successors, and developers of their spiritual-cultural and language tradition” rather than migrants or “guests” (Tekhov 1993: 15, 1994b: 15). The last words help to reveal the sources of Tekhov’s rhetoric, which in fact was a response to the Georgian chauvinist propaganda at the end of the 1980s – very early 1990s, that directed many accusations against the ethnic minorities while calling them “guests” and demanding that someone should “put them in their place”.

Tekhov’s approach was developed further by the archaeologist R. Gagloity, who attempted to trace the continuity between KAC, the Scythians-Sarmatians-Alans and the Ossetians and insisted on the permanent presence of this ethnic element in the highlands and on the hilly slopes of central Transcaucasia (Gagloity 1994. Also, see Medoiti, Chochiev 1994). It is worth noting that Vaneev linked KAC with the local Caucasian tribes who made a certain contribution to the formation of the Alans (Vaneev 1989: 337, 140, 144). This line of reasoning reaches its extreme point among some south Ossetian authors who have claimed to find evidence that the “ancient Ossetians” already lived in Southern Ossetia in the Early Bronze Age, i.e. in the 3rd Millennium B.C. (Chichinadze 1993: 8). One such author has even sought to prove that close contacts between the Indo-Iranians and the western Semites were established in the early 2nd Millennium B.C. (Kozaiiev 1993). This allowed him to date the early period of Ossetian prehistory to the 3rd – early 2nd Millennia B.C. His argument was that, at that time, they controlled the vast territory comprising the East European steppes, the Caucasus and all of modern Syria (Kozaiiev 1993: 22-23).

Ossetian scholars do their best to make the public aware of their views. They disseminate their knowledge through mass media and school textbooks. In May –

July 1999, an exhibition of Tli archaeological materials, excavated by Tekhov, was arranged in Vladikavkaz. The exhibition had generous coverage in the local media, in particular, in the journal "Alexandrovsky prospekt" (1999, N 7, September – October). This provided Tekhov a chance to share with the public his own view of the genetic links between the Koban' culture and the Indo-Iranians with the thrust being that "the Koban' people and the Scythians [were] the same ethnic group". In the meantime, the idea of genetic links between the contemporary Ossetians and the Koban' people is appreciated by the Ossetian intellectual elite. In 1999, the pagan ritual "Arvaiden" was performed in the Ossetian Theater of Drama in Vladikavkaz. The costumes were created by the Ossetian artist, Viola Khodova, who intentionally borrowed from the decorations on Koban' bronze artifacts.

Naturally, the Ossetian radical views of the past are met with great dissatisfaction by Georgian authors, who emphasize that the Scythians did not leave any direct descendants and that their cultural heritage is shared by various peoples (Totadze 1994: 54). Yet, the Georgians themselves demonstrate their own radical view of the Ossetians, according to which "all the best and outstanding things have been created on this [i.e. Georgian] side of the Great Caucasian Ridge". For example, the famous Maikop Silver Bowl of the 3rd Millennium B.C. is sometimes presented as an element of Georgian culture, and it is assumed that it was brought to the northern Caucasus from Transcaucasia (Bakradze, Chubinidze 1994: 89, 92).

The Georgian view of the local archaeological picture has been articulated by the archaeologist N. Apkhazava. He identified the well-known Kuro-Arax culture of the Early Bronze Age of the Caucasus and Asia Minor with the Kartvelians and the Hurrians⁸). He gratefully cited Tekhov's book of 1977, which identified the Koban' culture bearers with the Kartvelians. He found associations between the Koban' artistic expressions and Georgian folklore⁹) and concluded that "the Georgian tribes lived in the Upper Liakhvi River Valley in the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age". Referring to his Georgian counterparts, Apkhazava did his best to demonstrate that all Georgian scholars shared the view of continuous Georgian settlement in Shida Kartli in the 2nd – 1st Millennia B.C. (Apkhazava 1994: 28-39). In contrast to the Ossetian scholars, Apkhazava denied any mass Scythian migrations to Georgia. He interpreted the Scythian artifacts, found in the region, as evidence that only a few Scythian warriors arrived there, who rapidly merged with the local inhabitants (Apkhazava 1994: 40-45). Furthermore, he denied any continuity between the Scythians, the Sarmatians and the contemporary Ossetians. At the same time, while referring to the custom of putting a coin in a deceased person's mouth, evidently borrowed from the classical Greeks, the author interpreted this as evidence of cultural-ethnic unity in the territory of Georgia. He simply associated this with "Georgian unity" (Apkhazava 1994: 50), although, according to this logic, one might be speaking of "Greek unity". All of that demonstrates the interpretational deadlock resulting from ethnocentric views of the past. Finally, the author referred to "Georgian buckles", well-known throughout the territory of Georgia in the 1st Millennium A.D., as a strong argument in favor of

early Georgian cultural unity. Having said this, he did not hesitate, though those buckles were not found in “Georgian urbanized sites” (Apkhazava 1994: 50-52).

The author’s ethnocentric approach is apparent in that, on the one hand, he made an attempt to object to the Academician Dzhavakhishvili’s assumption that some non-Georgian groups once lived in the territory of Georgia (as we know, Dzhavakhishvili had in mind the North Caucasians, who were covered by the term the “Scythians”. V. Sh.) (Apkhazava 1994: 35), yet, on the other hand, in order to cleanse early Georgia of any Iranian agent, he argued that Strabo’s “Scythians” must be identified with the North Caucasian groups, for only they could live adjacent to Iberia (Apkhazava 1994: 58-59). For the sake of the latter, he agreed to identify the Koban’ culture bearers with the North Caucasian population (Apkhazava 1994: 60), thus undermining his own idea of their Kartvelian identity.

As one would expect, passions climax when the early medieval materials of Southern Ossetia are discussed. For example, the ethnic identity of those buried in the graveyards in the South Ossetian territory (in the Bolshaia Liakhvi River Basin) as well as southward in the Mtskheta region, dating to the 6th – 8th centuries, constitute the core of a very hot dispute. While referring to the distinct Sarmatian custom of skull deformation, as well as grave goods in an obviously north Caucasian style, the Ossetian archaeologist, R. G. Dzattiaty, chose to talk of the “Alans-Ossetians” infiltrating Transcaucasia as early as the early medieval period (Dzattiaty 1986)¹⁰. By contrast, the Georgian archaeologist, Apkhazava, does not see anybody there except Georgian Christians (Apkhazava 1988). Note that he argued this despite of the evident non-Christian burial rites and the entire lack of any Christian attributes of the graveyards in question. He denied any association between those graves and the Alan world only because they were in pits rather than in catacombs, like the Alans. However, later he isolated the “catacomb graves” from the Alan heritage as well for, in his view, they were discovered in an inappropriate area – in Central Kartli (Apkhazava 1994: 64-67). In fact, he manifested the clear intention to associate all the medieval materials of Shida Kartli with the Georgians alone, in order to conclude that only Georgians lived there from as early as the Bronze Age (sic! V. Sh.) (Apkhazava 1988, 1994: 72-73).

With reference to the complete silence of the historical documents, the Georgian historians also denied any Alan presence in Iberia in early medieval times (for example, see Gvasalia 1989: 3, 1990b: 37-38). Therefore, while discussing developments in the 1st Millennium B.C. – 1st Millennium A.D. in his fundamental study of the history of Shida Kartli, the Georgian historian, G. Gvasalia, not only failed to mention any Sarmatian migrations into the region, but avoided discussing Georgian-Alan contacts at all. Naturally, he ignored the remarkable Tli graveyard and, instead, found it sufficient to refer in passing to a significant influence of Late Bronze Age west Georgian culture (i.e. the Colchis archaeological culture. V. Sh.) to the central Caucasus (Gvasalia 1991a: 56-67). This view was appreciated by the members of the Committee for the Study of the South Ossetian Region’s Status, who emphasized in their conclusion that “no alien (i.e. non-Georgian. V. Sh.)

element has been traced” in the SOAR’s territory either in the classical or early medieval times (Shengelaia 1991: 4). Thus, the authors of this statement not only ignored all the evidence of Alan infiltration there, but intentionally failed to mention the Dvals, as well.

In the meantime, the South Ossetians develop quite opposite views. For them, archaeological data are of crucial importance. Yet, until very recently, they had to be cautious and to carefully hide their true views. Thus, the Ossetian archaeologist, R. Kh. Gagloev, who carried on a study of a Styrfazy graveyard of great importance to Transcaucasian archaeology, had to struggle to hide his “Alan sympathies” in a book he wrote in the 1970s. On the one hand, he convinced his reader that burial rites are the most reliable markers of ethnic identity (Gagloev 1984: 10), but on the other, he avoided discussing the ethnic identity of those buried in the graveyard. Instead, he reproduced the common Georgian argument about cultural unity in Georgia in early medieval times, although, in contrast to Apkhazava, he pointed to the archaeological parallels with the Sarmatian steppes, the northern Caucasus, and, especially North Ossetia (Gagloev 1984: 93). Naturally, in those days he did not dare to talk about Alan migrations from the north. Instead, he emphasized the close contacts and intensive cultural interaction between northern Georgia and the Sarmatian-Alan world (Gagloev 1984: 96).

South Ossetian scholars came to be more open in the 1990s. Nowadays, they appreciate Tekhov’s new approach very much, for it provides arguments for combining the Iranian language with the idea of autochthonism, and, thus, the Iranians turn out to be indigenous inhabitants of the central Caucasus. Being quite dubious in the minds of value free specialists (for a criticism, see Kuznetsov 1996, 1997), this concept is gratefully picked up by the authors of propaganda literature aimed at building up national self-awareness among the Ossetians and the encouragement of their solidarity and patriotism. Tekhov’s reading of the archaeological data helps to represent the Ossetians as the earliest people in the Caucasus, true heirs of Koban’ cultural traditions, and the Iranian language as a genuine Caucasian tongue (Chichinadze 1993: 13; Chibirov 1994: 30-32). With these arguments in hand, the South Ossetians resisted the aforementioned Georgian media’s chauvinist accusations and calls to resettle the South Ossetians in their “historical homeland”, i.e. in North Ossetia¹¹). These arguments also make up a strong basis for the South Ossetians to claim their indigenous status in northern Georgia (Chichinadze 1993: 3-14). At the same time, the Ossetians would be satisfied with a more moderate approach, representing South Ossetia as part of the medieval Alan state, which joined Georgia after the Alan state had collapsed (Khostikoeva 1991; Gagloiti 1993: 17).

In search of the image of glorious ancestors, which might attract the public, contemporary South Ossetian ideologists insist that the early Iranians made a great impact upon European classical and medieval culture (for example, see Chochiev 1996: 248-250). Thus, the Ossetians appropriate the “elder brother” status, which the Europeans have to respect in terms of the highlanders’ norms of behavior.

This is not the end of the story. Recently, Ossetian intellectuals strove to recruit the image of the glorious “Aryans”, whom they represent as their direct ancestors. Thus, one of the leaders of the south Ossetian nationalist movement, the ethnologist Alan Chochiev, emphasizes the relationships between the Koban’ people and the Aryans (Chochiev 1996: 247). In order to enjoy the support of the Russian nationalists, he hints that the founder of the Russian state, Prince Oleg, might have been born to the “Aryan priests” who were the forefathers of the Ossetians as well (Chochiev 1996: 251).

In order to demonstrate the unique importance of the south Ossetian territory, Alan Chochiev argues that its capital, Tskhinval, and adjacent areas served as the most important sacred lands of the ancient Aryans. It was the site of many of their sanctuaries, a place for religious ceremonies, a habitat for martyred heroes and even “the Aryan homeland” from the time of the Koban’ archaeological culture. He hints that this is where Jesus Christ learned the wisdom of sacrificial behavior in his teens and youth (Chochiev n.d.: 81-84)¹².

Whereas Chochiev confines himself to a hint, two other authors, Valerii Khamitsev and Alexander Balaev, claim that the Galileans were Iranian-speaking descendants of the ancient Aryans, “the Israeli Scythians”, and that Jesus’ mother was “a Scythian”. It follows from this argument that both Jesus Christ and eleven of the Apostles (not Judas) were in fact close relatives of the Ossetians, and that Christianity formed the original core of the culture of the “Ossetians, the Alans of the Caucasus”. Thus, Galilea is depicted as the land of the “Scythians-Alans”. It is also claimed that Georgia was baptized 400 years later than Ossetia, and that Ossetia, rather than Georgia, was the main original stronghold of Christianity and the bulwark against Islam in the Caucasus. This line of reasoning is also used to legitimize the demand to re-establish an independent “Alan eparchy” in Ossetia (Khamitsev, Balaev 1992).

Finally, the Ossetians place major emphasis on the existence of an early independent “Alan Empire”. It is of course of vital importance to them to prove that this state emerged and flourished by no means later than the Abkhazian Kingdom (Bekuzarov 1994) and that it was a “co-founder of Russian power” (Khamitsev, Kargaev 1993). The same idea, but articulated even more radically, was recently developed by Chochiev, who said that “the Scythian-Narty-Ass ethnos was always present in the region (between the Crimea and Lower Volga River, and the northern Caucasus. V. Sh.)”. He also hinted that some forms of Iranian political structure were persistently maintained there throughout the time, although they were not always clearly recorded by historical sources (Chochiev 1996: 251).

The Ossetians are proud of their “Scythian-Narty” heritage, associated with the famous Narty Epic, which is ascribed by the Ossetians to their direct ancestors. This epic has been used by Ossetian nationalists for the elaboration of new national symbols. In 1989, Ossetian historians invented the new Ossetian white-red-yellow banner, based on the social color symbolism borrowed from the epic¹³.

The idea of former Indo-European unity is sometimes used by the Ossetians in

order to justify their pro-Russian political orientation. At the beginning of 1991, while explaining the political actions of South Ossetia, certain Ossetian intellectuals referred to its “faithfulness to its Indo-European relationships” as if the latter caused the aspiration among the South Ossetian nationalists to integrate South Ossetia into the Russian Federation (Abaev et al. 1991). This extremely primordialist argument has been challenged by the Georgians with both anger and bitter irony. They were shocked by such persistent Ossetian attachment to their “Aryan heritage” and expressed doubt that this romantic attitude was so valuable to them that they had to cultivate it at the cost of the territorial integrity of Georgia (Khakhutaishvili, Shamiladze 1991; Kharadze et al. 1991).

Ossetian historical mythology is thus constructed using the same strategies as those used by the Abkhazians. The Ossetians have attempted to extend their past in their modern territory, to demonstrate their huge contribution to Caucasian history (the introduction of iron, their contribution to the development of early state organization, the creation of the Narty Epic, and, finally their direct participation in the emergence of many groups of Caucasian highlanders) and to mankind in general (the introduction of Christianity). They also stress the existence of early statehood among their Alan ancestors and assume that the first Georgian and Abkhazian Kings were of Alan origin (for the latter, see Khostikoeva 1991).

The South Ossetian version of the past has its particularities, however. First, in the face of powerful opposition from Georgian historiography, and lacking reliable historical evidence, Ossetian authors consciously exaggerate their mythology, lending it fantastic features. The latter include claims of being the earliest to adopt Christianity, of having enormous past territory and of holding a central place in the Aryan (Indo-Iranian) tradition. Second, there is an attempt to combine their association with the glorious deeds of the ancient Iranians (Scythians, Sarmatians, and Alans), who were unquestionably newcomers in the Caucasus, with emphasis on the Ossetians’ autochthonous origin.

This difficult task is accomplished in the following way. It is well-established that many Caucasian highland peoples, including the Ossetians, were of heterogeneous origin, i.e. both newcomers and local groups contributed to their formation. Ossetian authors strive to exploit this complex process to their advantage. Being unwilling to give up their Iranian cultural and language heritage, they insist that their ancestors were Iranians by blood and that the newcomers assimilated comparatively small groups of local inhabitants. Thus, any mass Iranizing of the natives is certainly out of the question to Ossetian authors. To prove this, the Ossetians try to put the presence of the ancient Iranians in the Caucasus as far back as the Late Bronze Age (KAC), if not earlier. Once again, this is an explicitly primordialist approach. Ossetian authors have unreservedly identified the Ossetians with the Alans, the Sarmatians and even the Scythians. This view is

imposed upon the populace by schools, the media and various pieces of literature. It plays a very important role in the shaping of contemporary Ossetian identity, to the extent that certain Ossetian intellectuals clamor to replace their self-designation from “Ossetians” to “Alans” (Shnirelman 1996b)¹⁴.

CONCLUSION:

**ETHNOCENTRISM AND THE BREAKUP OF
THE SOVIET UNION**

The strong mobilizing power of a nationalist ideology has been stressed for years by experts in nationalism (Gellner 1983; Horowitz 1985; Boucher et al. 1987; Anderson 1991; Levinger, Lytle 2001), who also point to the great importance of images of a glorious past, and great ancestors. They call for a study of the extensive use of these images in the mass media and at school to shape a people's national identity and general worldview. Yet, only a few have attempted to address their research methodology to the ideologies that were forged and disseminated in the various Soviet republics for decades. However, it is by no means a secret nowadays that, side by side with the communist ideology, nationalist ideologies were developed and advocated in various republics of the USSR, articulated in ethnic terms due to the ethno-administrative arrangement of state territorial organizations (Verdery 1998: 293-294). That is why, while discussing the ideological nature of the Soviet regime, one has to bear in mind that the latter not only promoted the domination of the communist ideology but also excited the popularity of ethno-nationalist ideologies (Cf. Bessinger 1997: 169). This does not mean, though, that the Soviet communists were indiscriminately attached to nationalism. On the contrary, many times the federal center launched extensive campaigns against nationalism. Yet, it is easy to notice that, beginning in the very late 1930s, these campaigns were aimed against ethnic nationalisms of titular peoples of distinctly non-Russian republics. In their turn, the local republican authorities called for struggle against ethnic nationalism on the part of the respective ethnic minorities.

We have already examined six different ethnic groups, which enjoyed the status of titular populations in their administrative territories in the Soviet era. Some lived in Soviet Republics (the Armenians, Azeris, and Georgians), others in Autonomous Republics (the Abkhazians) and others in Autonomous Regions (the Armenians of the NKAR and the South Ossetians). After the dissolution of the USSR, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan became independent national states, and the other three groups have established their own political-territorial units, not yet recognized by the international community. In the Soviet era, some of the enumerated groups were formally subordinated to others, due to the hierarchical Soviet administrative system. Thus, the Soviet authorities deliberately promoted a development of the ranked ethnic system, albeit different from those described by Donald Horowitz (1985). Indeed, under this environment various ethnic groups had very complicated political inter-relationships. These looked different on the republican level than they did on the level of lower-status autonomies. For example, on the republican level the Armenians, the Azeris and the Georgians represented titular nations, whereas the Abkhazians, the NKAR Armenians and the South Ossetians were ethnic minorities. Yet, in their own autonomies, the latter three groups enjoyed titular status, and in two of the three cases (in South Ossetia and the NKAR) the titular populations (South Ossetians and Armenians) vastly outnumbered those who belonged to the titular majorities of the respective Soviet Republics, namely the Georgians and the Azeris. Only in Abkhazia did the titular

population (the Abkhazians) constitute a demographic minority.

At the same time, the titular population enjoyed certain political privileges in the USSR, and its representatives usually had access to key political positions in their autonomies. Under the hierarchical political and territorial system, this caused persistent tensions between different levels of authority. Indeed, the republican authorities were greatly interested in the restriction of the administrative power of the subordinated authorities of the lower-level autonomies, and, by contrast, the latter strove for the extension of their own power. True, the former had more means at their disposal to enforce pressure upon the latter. For example, the republican authorities kept the appointments to higher power positions in the autonomies under their control, and through their mediation the autonomies received financial support from the federal center. If the leaders of the autonomies were dissatisfied with decisions made by the republican authorities, they could apply to Moscow, although the response from the federal center depended greatly on personal relationships between the higher Moscow officials and the local political leaders. Therefore, all the local leaders had to struggle with each other for the sympathies of the Moscow bureaucrats.

Yet, while being helpful in tactical terms, this policy was less reliable strategically, because of the rotation of Moscow bureaucrats. With each change of personnel, one had to start from the very beginning. Strategically, the status of a titular population was much more beneficial in the USSR. This status could be legally claimed only by an indigenous group that had lived in the same territory for centuries and enjoyed cultural and linguistic authenticity. Thus, language and culture were fated to become vital political resources under the circumstances in question. This does not mean that either the local inhabitants or, in particular, the scholars were well aware of these factors. Yet, they were always born in mind by the local authorities. It is no accident that they often initiated the publication of scholarly articles in the local media, focusing on the origins and early history of the titular peoples. One can learn a lot by examining the national celebration of anniversaries of local early states or republican capitals, that were arranged by local authorities in order to demonstrate the people's deep roots in the given territory. It is also worth recalling the political role of Transcaucasian ethnogenetic constructs in the late 1940s, when Stalin was dreaming of southward Soviet expansion at the expense of Turkey and Iran. At that time, the search for Georgian ancestors in Asia Minor, the identification of Hayasa with the Armenian cradle, and the discovery of the Azeri heritage in ancient Media were encouraged even by the federal center. Periodic campaigns of the struggle for the "historic truth" initiated by the local authorities are also informative, if one is aware that the "truth" was identified with the view of ethnogenesis and early history developed by the historical school which advocated the titular group's interests. It is in this respect that decisions of the plenums of the NKAR Regional Party Branch of 1975 and of the CC CPG of 1978 played a major role. Finally, one has to acknowledge that the production of school textbooks on local history was under the severe control of the local authorities, and

these textbooks provided the populace with simplified views about the past that were intended to legitimize the political domination of the titular nation.

Thus, under the Soviet environment scholars suffered a heavy pressure from both academic, and social and political milieus (fig.1). Yet, there was a big difference in that symmetrical relationships governed an academic community whereas relationships between a scholar and socio-political environment were of asymmetrical nature. That means that a scholar was highly pressed by bureaucracy, financial organizations, media, educational structures, and public attitude rather than vice versa. It is no accident that under this environment the scholars were highly vulnerable to ethno-nationalist ideologies.

In what way did appeal to early history help to legitimize the right to titular (indigenous) status, and which arguments, in particular, were employed for that? Indeed, it is well established that some of the ethnic groups in question came about mainly due to great tribal migrations in medieval times. Thus, the formation of the Azeri people was caused by continuous Turkic migrations from the east. The Ossetian people emerged because of Iranian nomadic tribes' movement from the East European steppe belt. The NKAR Armenians came into being due to the

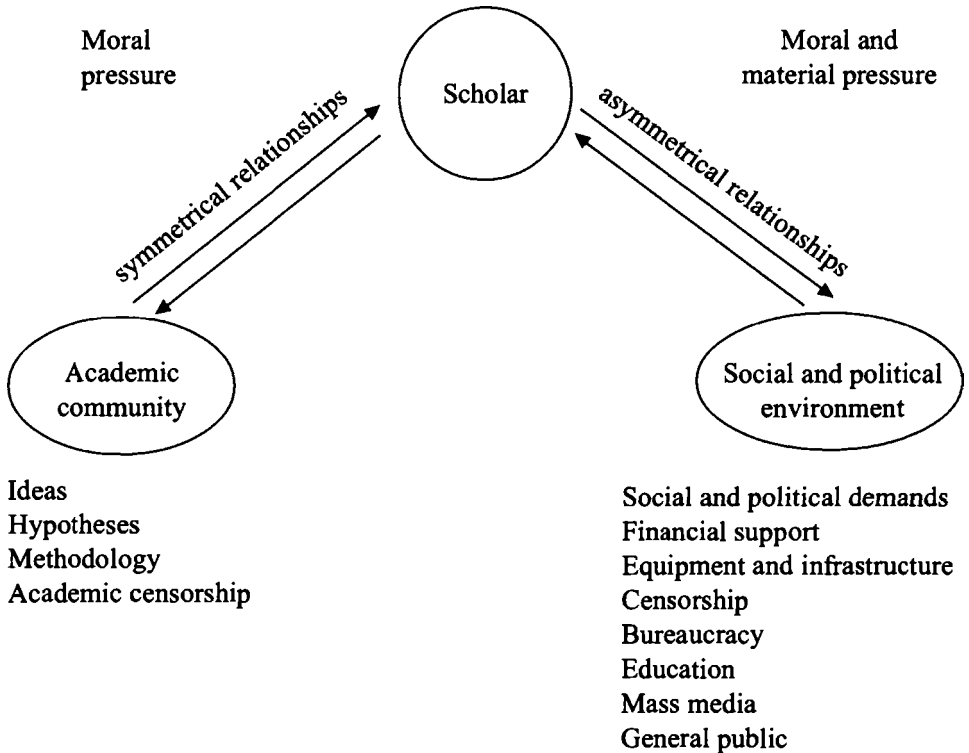


Fig. 1 Relationships between a scholar and an environment

expansionist policy of the Arsacid Dynasty in the last centuries B.C. The core of the Armenians of the Armenian SSR resulted from numerous Armenian resettlements from the Armenian plateau during the 1st Millennium B.C., which started, perhaps, during the time of Urartu. Similar clear historical evidence of early migrations is lacking for the Abkhazians and the Georgians. Yet, as we know, local historians exploited the migrationist models during certain Soviet periods.

Meanwhile, regardless of the historical evidence, local historians did their best in the 1950s – 1980s to confirm the indigenous (autochthonous) status of their own ethnic groups with respect to competing neighboring populations. The struggle for both territorial rights and political sovereignty over the respective territories was the basis of this activity. Indeed, under the Soviet environment the status of “newcomer” either weakened the position of the actors in the struggle in question or left no chances for victory at all. This was why distinct ethnic groups were so intent on the search for their local primordial ancestors and, by contrast, made every effort to represent their ethnic competitors as later “newcomers”. From this perspective, the struggle for ancestors had a political excuse. It had a very important political message for all the participants and has to be viewed as a common attribute of interethnic relationships in the USSR in general. It is worth noting that this ideological struggle was waged continuously, even during those periods when interethnic relationships looked harmonious on the surface, and both sides were vowing eternal and inviolable friendship.

The political message embedded in the views of the past clearly manifests itself in the context of the Georgian-Abkhazian, Georgian-South Ossetian and Armenian-Azeri conflicts. The Georgian historians emphasized the extensive settlement of Georgian tribes over the east Black Sea region during the Early Iron Age and in classical times, whereas the Abkhazians were represented as later newcomers who had arrived on the littoral either in the very early centuries A.D. or even in late medieval times. In their turn, Abkhazian scholars argued that the East Black Sea region made up part of the huge territory occupied by the Abkhazian-Adygehe ancestors that was broken apart by the Kartvelian wedge in a later period. From this perspective, the Georgians turned out to be the later newcomers.

Georgian authors represented the Georgians as the indigenous population of Shida Kartli that only began to be infiltrated by the Ossetians during the 14th – 17th centuries. On their side, their Ossetian counterparts emphasized mass migrations of Iranian-speaking nomads to Transcaucasia in the course of the Early Iron Age and early medieval period, to the extent that the Koban’ culture has been identified by certain Ossetian archaeologists with Iranian-speakers. Seen this way, the Ossetians rather than the Georgians turn out to be the autochthonous inhabitants of the central Caucasus.

Armenian historians argued that the Armenians settled throughout the territory between the Kura and Arax Rivers during the 1st Millennium B.C. or in the first centuries A.D. at the latest. Referring to quite clear written sources, they wrote of later gradual Turkic infiltration into east Transcaucasia over centuries. Karabagh

was viewed as the last region invaded by Turkic nomads, very late in history. Thus, the Armenians unreservedly linked the Azeri ancestors with the Turks. Azeri scholars developed a different picture, while doing their best either to identify their ancestors with the Albanians, the indigenous inhabitants of east Transcaucasia, or to extend Turkic history in the region into the implausible past. From these perspectives, the NKAR Armenians were represented as Armenized Albanians, i.e. not proper Armenians, who were instead close relatives of the Azeris.

The Azeri case shows an original approach to the language issue, less common in the Soviet environment, where language served as the major factor of identity. Indeed, it is widely believed that loss of their mother tongue and shift to the language of more powerful neighbors deprives ethnic groups of their originality, undermines their claims to authenticity and greatly weakens their positions in the struggle for indigenous status and domination (for that, see Horowitz 1985: 219; Shnirelman 1996b; Matsuo 1999). Yet, the nature of the historical evidence did not provide the Azeris equally strong arguments in favor of both autochthonous status and linguistic continuity. They had to make a choice, and, while struggling for indigenous status, the Azeri scholars chose local ancestors, i.e. biological continuity, at the expense of loyalty to their own language. At the same time, while identifying their own ancestors with the indigenous population, they treated the Armenians as newcomers and conquerors.

The opposition of “in-group” and “out-group” in the form of “indigenous people” against “newcomers”, revealed in the discussions above, played a part in the course of the rapid escalation of ethnic conflicts in Transcaucasia. Indeed, polarization of thinking is a common feature of an ethnic conflict (Stagner 1987: 12-13). One can see a uniform trend to convert ethnic neighbors, be they a minority or a majority of the population, into the category of recent immigrants. The latter were indiscriminately presented as aliens who endangered the local culture and values. The concept of the “indigenous people” was aimed against them, along with abundant arguments in favor of deliverance from “unwelcome guests”, which reads more frankly as ethnic cleansing. This is reminiscent of the attitude toward immigrants in contemporary Western Europe, and can be seen within the same model of “cultural fundamentalism” (Stolcke 1995). Interestingly, the term “indigenous people” was by no means popular in official Soviet rhetoric. It was associated with the colonial lexicon, which was considered inappropriate for use by Soviet people (Sokolovsky 1998: 83-84). At the same time, as emerges from the data at hand, the notion of “indigenous people” proved to be highly viable. It was persistently borne in mind by the builders of the ethnogenetic concepts in question, and its popularity in post-Soviet reality is no accident. Nowadays, as in the Soviet era, this notion is closely linked with political struggle between different ethnic elites.

Thus, it is obvious that the historical discourse focused on two key oppositions, namely, autochthonous people versus newcomers and language continuity versus language discontinuity. Autochthonous origin and language continuity provided the

desired arguments to support the claim to indigenous status, hence, the status of a titular people. Yet, a thorough analysis of the ethnogenetic constructions in question reveals that other arguments were employed as well, which strengthened or weakened the previously discussed ones. Also, the latter were far from absolute and were subject to being reinterpreted.

As a result, although doubtlessly important, autochthonous origin did not enjoy absolute priority. The status of newcomers could also be valuable if it proved helpful for identifying one's ancestry from some early people, famous for their glorious deeds, especially if they were known as the builders of early civilization. That is why the Ossetians, while willing to associate their ancestors with the local Koban' culture, do not fail to recall their relations with the Scythians, Sarmatians and the Alans, those fearless warriors, successful conquerors and founders of the early states in the south of eastern Europe. The Abkhazians and the Georgians do not think it is enough to have autochthonous ancestors in Transcaucasia. They greatly value their ancestors or relatives in Asia Minor who give them a history of participating in the establishment of the earliest human civilizations. The Armenians did not avoid this trend either. It does not seem sufficient for them to be the successors of the early empire of Tigran the Great. They hunger for the glory of the state of Urartu. Participation in its development turns their ancestors into the builders of the earliest state in Transcaucasia, and thus makes them symbolically superior to their ethnic neighbors. This provides them certain psychological compensation for those significant political losses that their ancestors suffered in the medieval period, when they were permanently subordinated to some of the more powerful neighboring states. In their turn, the Azeris ascribe to their own ancestors not only all the medieval political formations in the East Transcaucasia but also in much earlier Media Atropatene and even very much earlier Manna. The latter helps them to compete with the Armenians for the status of early civilizers.

Thus, besides autochthonous status, the local inhabitants value two more attributes – the status of early bearers of higher culture and the status of builders of the early state. It seems that the idea that their ancestors arrived from the north Caucasus does not satisfy the Abkhazians, not only because it deprives them of indigenous status but also because it identifies them with the descendants of backward, barbaric people. In contrast, they have no objections to the identification of their ancestors with migrants from Asia Minor (Kaska, Abeshla) that turns them into the descendants of early civilizers. This provides important symbolic prestige, and the Abkhazians appreciate that. One can observe the same trend in the Georgian ethnogenetic schemes. Whereas in their dispute with the South Ossetians, Georgian authors emphasize the indigenous status of the Georgians in Shida Kartli to the extent that Kartli is presented as the Georgian homeland, while elaborating their general ethnogenetic concept, they make sure to mention their "homeland" in Asia Minor. This strategy has two goals: first, as it was noted, it is considered prestigious to have ancestors in early Asia Minor, and second, the Georgians always keep in mind the lands of northeastern Turkey, populated by Mingrelian-speaking Laz.

These lands are regularly included in discussion of the original Georgian territories and are always represented on maps of "Greater Georgia". Azeri scholars demonstrate the same attitude towards northwestern Iran. On the one hand, they show their earliest states there (the prestigious factor), and on the other hand, they never forget that their Azeri relatives still live there (the territorial factor).

Almost all the ethnic groups in question appreciate an idea of linguistic continuity. Indeed, this factor helps to establish unbroken continuity with glorious ancestors, indigenous inhabitants of the given territory. Yet, a more complex attitude towards linguistic affiliation is demonstrated in two cases. As has been mentioned, the Azeris are unable to prove their linguistic continuity with any indigenous people in eastern Transcaucasia. Therefore, in order to secure their indigenous status, they have to emphasize cultural and biological continuity from the Caucasian-speaking Albanians and the Iranian-speaking Atropateneans up to the Turkic-speaking Azeris. In their turn, the Ossetians give special merit to their own Iranian cultural, linguistic and political traditions, which they inherited from the glorious Scythians and the Sarmatians. Yet, the latter were obvious newcomers in the Caucasus, and too heavy emphasis on relations with them obviously undermines the Ossetian indigenous status. Therefore, the Ossetian authors do their best to provide their ancestors deeper roots in the central Caucasus. Hence came their restless attempts to identify the Koban' culture with Iranian-speaking people. In fact, the same strategy is being developed by the Azeri revisionists. On the one hand, they emphasize their great Turkic political heritage, and on the other, do their best to deepen the Turkic past in Transcaucasia to the extent that they identify the Albanians with the Turks. True, there is also a big difference between the Azeri and the Ossetian approaches. The Ossetians are trying to reach their ancestors through language continuity, and the Azeris through a territorial one. These are the roots of the Azeri habit of identifying historical actors mainly through their native areas, which always surprises their Armenian counterparts.

Thus, one can distinguish between the following elements of a desirable image of the distant past, which contribute to the shaping of ethnic identity and are closely linked with political status in a given territory. They are as follows: a) autochthonous origin, b) language continuity, c) cultural continuity, d) military glory of the remote ancestors, e) their participation in the building of early states, f) a civilizing mission by the remote ancestors, and g) biological continuity. In the very best case, all these elements supplement each other. If there are contradictions between them, the most valued are the ones that provide stronger arguments in favor of indigenous origin. As a result, territoriality ultimately proves to be the main factor of identity and a common cause of ethnic conflicts (Landis, Boucher 1987: 20-21). Moreover, what is meant by territoriality in this context is not so much access to economic exploitation of local resources as political authority in the given territory. This is because political power serves as the most reliable legitimate basis for the collective use of territory in the contemporary world. This is the excuse for ethnic nationalism.

It is also interesting that religion played only a minor role in all the examined cases. It was viewed only as an aspect of ethnic culture, as a valuable heritage, evidence in favor of territorial rights. Therefore, if the Armenian or Georgian ethnogenetic concepts mentioned the early medieval churches, they did so to the extent that the latter could demonstrate the extensive influence of the respective cultures while being clear markers of their former borders. This obvious downplaying of the religious factor and its very pragmatic treatment were the result of Soviet internal policy, which deliberately suppressed religion. Officially, religion has been erased from the list of valuable identities, with but a few exceptional cases like, for example, the Ajars or the Meskhetian Turks. Nonetheless, the Armenians never forgot that they were monophysites. The Georgians and the Ossetians remembered their own bonds with the Orthodox Church, and the Azeris did not break with Islam. The Abkhazians made a special case, as the co-existence of three traditional religions was an obvious obstacle to any blend of religious and ethnic identity.

Yet, the religious factor of identity grew in importance after the break up of the USSR and the collapse of communist ideology. The Abkhazian case is of special interest in this respect. They had to choose among three religious traditions. Christianity strengthened links with Russia, and, at least theoretically, was able to ease the confrontation with Georgia. Islam helped to maintain contacts with the Abkhazian Diaspora abroad. Paganism is the basis of the traditional Abkhazian behavioral culture (*apsuara*) that is very important in post-Soviet Abkhazia.

In any case, as we have seen, ideas about distant ancestors played a big role in the Transcaucasian peoples' identities, and were closely related to important political attitudes concerning ethnic neighbors. The goal of the republican titular population was to assimilate the ethnic minorities, and to achieve this goal they built regional histories that incorporated distinct histories of ethnic minorities to the extent that the latter turned out to be an integral part of the titular population. That is why the Azeris associated the NKAR Armenians with the Albanian descendants, and the Georgian authors included the Abkhazian language in the Iberian-Caucasian family of languages converting it to a close relative of the Kartvelian language. This sort of rapprochement facilitated the integration and the assimilation of ethnic minorities. In their turn, being aware of this threat, the latter were constructing their own views of history. In that process, they strove to isolate their own history as much as possible from that of the titular population. Thus, they legitimized their status as an authentic people, which made them able to claim special political rights or privileges. Indeed, under the Soviet regime, only a distinct indigenous ethnic group was allowed to claim a privileged political-territorial status, in contrast with any other group that constituted an integral part of a more inclusive ethnic entity. In this situation, identity had to be based not only on horizontal ties as illuminated by Benedict Anderson (1991) but, even more, on vertical ties, which linked people with their ancestors. These latter ties were fervently constructed and advocated by local historians.

Therefore, all the analyzed elements of ethnic identity were ultimately closely associated with politics. This was unavoidable in the Soviet system, where the politicization of ethnicity was based on legal grounds. Political factors promoted the manipulation of all the aforementioned elements of ethnic identity and strongly affected views of the distant past. Hence, the obvious dependency of historical arguments on the given political environment, which can be demonstrated by the following available evidence. Dealing with the Abkhazians, the Georgians employed a general democratic argument. They referred to the overrepresentation of the Abkhazians in the power structures, and argued that the Abkhazian minority suppressed the Georgian majority. In contrast, in the Ossetian case they emphasized that the South Ossetian majority discriminated against the Georgian minority and the Georgian culture. To put it other way, in the latter case they came out on behalf of an ethnic minority that claimed the status of indigenous people. That is, here the Georgians defended using the very position that, they said, was used against them by the Abkhazians in Abkhazia. It seems instructive to note that the Azeris avoided employing this particular argument against the NKAR Armenians. They did not do that, perhaps, because, as we know, the role of language and culture was much less important to their identity than the territorial principle was.

All of this provides strong evidence in favor of an instrumentalist approach toward views of the distant past, which are developed and advocated in order to achieve goals far removed from the purely academic. Permanent ethnic tensions that endangered ethnic values as well as the political and territorial status of distinct ethnic groups made local intellectuals close ranks to the extent that they had to be loyal to the same view of the past. Corporate attitudes dominated in this environment, leaving no space for any plurality of historical approaches. Deviant historians immediately found themselves in social isolation and had to appreciate their pariah status. Hence came the unbelievable cohesion of local intellectuals, which clearly manifested itself in all the aforementioned cases of ideological struggles for the past. Thus, in respect to their role as mechanisms for shaping and means of mobilizing ideology, it seems reasonable to draw a parallel between communism and ethnic nationalism. In both cases, policy demands a powerful ideological basis, which is able to attract the people at large. This ideology is produced by professionals who are stuck with a given ideological model. The latter is presented as the sacred value of a given people, which is beyond question, or should not be revised on pain of severe punishment. There is no room for democracy or any pluralism of opinions in this climate. It is also worth noting that the image of an enemy plays an important role in both cases. The only difference is that the enemy was presented by communist ideology in terms of social class, and by ethnic nationalism as the alien foreigner. Therefore, the transformation from communism to ethnic nationalism was not a big deal as concerned ideology. The required ideologies were already there, and a mechanism for their formation and application to mass mobilization was well elaborated. These ideologies were very popular in the post-Soviet states in the 1990s.

Finally, the enumerated elements of identity were not only embedded into local concepts of history but were imposed upon people from an early age through school history textbooks. The elements of ethnic identity were offered there as the foundation of local patriotism. The romanticizing of ancestors was undertaken, their deep roots in the given territory were emphasized, their great cultural achievements (writing system, literature, architecture, metallurgy) were glorified, their long courageous struggle against foreign invaders and oppressors in defense of their sovereignty or independence was stressed. Newcomers might play an important role in the formation of the given people or in their historical fate. The Azeris obtained their contemporary language from the Turks. The Qypchaqs and the Ossetians provided the Georgians with military assistance against external enemies. The Georgians played an important cultural role for the Abkhazians and South Ossetians. However, the views of the distant past analyzed above neglected cultural synthesis or ignored it entirely for the sake of the myth of some pure original indigenous culture. In this respect, the painful positions that both Azeris and Georgians held regarding Mesrob Mashtots is very instructive. At the same time, this does not mean that all external influence is denied. For example, over the last decade, the Abkhazians began to value the bonds between their ancestors and the classical Greeks which help them claim a connection with the ancient higher civilization much better than obscure relationships with the Kaska and Abeshla did.

In any case, local textbooks presented a very attractive image of the early local state. It was viewed as a desirable goal, which was the prime mover of their respected ancestors' activities. The latter either defended their own state from their enemies' attacks, or persistently waged a struggle for liberation from foreign rule and the establishment of their own state. This very positive image of their own state was characteristic of all the textbooks in history published in the non-Russian republics and regions of the USSR. In contrast, the standard pan-Soviet textbooks emphasized the exploitative and imperial nature of Russian statehood, and the latter was perceived by school children mainly with negative overtones. Hence come those anti-state attitudes among the great majority of the ethnic Russians that shock contemporary Russian nationalists. That is why the breakup of the USSR in December 1991 was perceived quite indifferently by a large number of Russians, whereas non-Russian titular peoples began to build enthusiastically their own national states. Thus, while examining large-scale political behavior and making predictions about its future development, one has to consider popular views of history and their powerful ethno-political charge.

NOTES

Introduction: Myths, Symbols and Politics

1. For these two approaches to the past, see Ben-Yehuda 1995: 273-274.
2. Stephen Velychenko (1993) has successively examined some of these factors.

Part I The Armenian-Azeri Confrontation

1. For his professional career, see Yakobson 2000.
2. While sharing this concept in general, Diakonov put into doubt the idea that the name “Armens” existed at this early age, because it has never been a self-designation of the Armenians. He also denied the possibility of any connections between them and the Hayasa (Diakonov 1983: 167, 172).
3. Most scholars do not share Manandian’s view of Hayasa localization and its identification with Nairi. For example, see Redgate 1998: 26-27. Yet, a foreign Armenian historian, V. Kurkjan (1958: 32), agreed with Manandian .
4. For a criticism of the proto-Armenian links with Hayasa, see Diakonov 1968: 209-213
5. For Marr’s influence on Kapantsian, see Djahukian 1967a: 28; Diakonov 1968: 213.
6. In his earlier works, Kapantsian was more inclined to acknowledge a major contribution from the Phrygian cultural sub-stratum. For example, see Kapantsian 1956: 267-327. For an Indo-European affiliation of the Armenian language and the erroneous nature of Kapantsian’s linguistic arguments, see Diakonov 1968: 202-203.
7. For role of the Scythian chief, Partatua/Paroyr, who led an uprising against the Assyrians, see Piotrovsky 1959; Russell 1997: 27.
8. True, N. V. Khazaradze, who studied these materials came to quite the opposite conclusion and identified the Mushki with the “Kartvelians”. See Khazaradze 1984.
9. For the erroneous nature of this approach, see Diakonov 1968: 213-214.
10. There are more reasons to relate the Hayasa language to Northwestern Caucasian group though. See Diakonov 1968: 84.
11. For his contribution to the studies of Urartu and the development of Transcaucasian archaeology, see Areshian 1992a.
12. In fact, the country of Nairi was first, situated to the southeast of Hayasa, second, had very arbitrary borders, and third, consisted of a few dozen kingdoms with highly heterogeneous populations. There was no question of there being any uniform people there. See Diakonov 1968: 88, 99; Redgate 1998: 27.
13. For him and his historical ideas, see also Astourian 1994: 45-47.
14. For example, Ishkhanian’s approach deprives the well-known Armenian writer and public activist, Z. Balaian, of an Armenian identity because the latter spoke and wrote Russian and was incompetent in Armenian. Ishkhanian was aware of that (Ishkhanian 1991: 26).
15. For the first time he “discovered” a “proto-Russian civilization” in the Lake Sevan region in the mid-1970s.
16. Yet, in an interview given in November 1989, Heydar Aliev denied any backwardness of Azerbaijan (Karaulov 1990: 243).
17. For his career, see Van der Leeuw 2000: 131-132.
18. Nowadays, the Azeri view of history is shared by Van der Leeuw (2000).
19. For the Armenian-Azeri conflict for Karabagh in details, see Croissant 1998.

20. For him, see Goldenberg 1994: 120-121.
21. In fact, these “natural borders” were defined by the policy of the Ottoman Empire, which, at that time, was planning to establish a satellite state there if not to annex a large part of Transcaucasia (Zubov 2000: 152).
22. Later on, in accordance with the Soviet hierarchical bureaucratic system, they tried to ascribe the initiative to the Chairman of the Azerbaijan government, N. Narimanov (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 5). For Zifel’dt-Simumiagy, see Ashnin, Alpatov 2001.
23. Later on, Azerbaijani authors criticized him for that. See Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 11.
24. For Marr’s theory and its effects on the Soviet scholarship, see Alpatov 1991; Shnirelman 1995a; Slezkine 1996.
25. For Rasulzada, see Djavadi 1990: 100-101.
26. Recently a western scholar developed this Azeri argument. See van der Leeuw 2000: 19.
27. Later on, this would become commonplace in the Azeri concept of history. For example, see Guseinov 1958: 165-166.
28. For how this portrait came into being, see Diakonov 1995: 732.
29. For the role of Yampol’sky’s concepts in Azeri scholarship as seen from different angles, see Sumbatzade 1987: 109, 129; Melik-Oganjanian 1968: 170; Novosel’tsev 1991: 198.
30. Surprisingly, this approach is shared by Van der Leeuw (2000: 17).
31. For a criticism of this approach, see Aliev 1989: 138, note 211.
32. For sharp criticism of this approach, see Aliev 1990b: 158; Sumbatzade 1990: 76-77.
33. For the Persian nature of the movement from an Armenian point of view, see Bartkian 1989.
34. For the Sussanian nature of those constructions, see Aliev 1985.
35. For a criticism, see Aliev 1988a: 64; 1989a: 92.
36. In fact, classical evidence of the Caspians is scarce and obscure; and experts choose to avoid going deeply into this issue. For that, see Novosel’tsev 1979: 3; Akopian 1987: 50-55.
37. For a criticism of the volume, see Aliev 1988a: 64-66.
38. For a criticism of his reasoning, see Aliev 1988a: 63; 1989a: 95-97.
39. For a detailed criticism of Yusifov’s constructions, see Aliev 1989a.
40. Igrar Aliev treats his methodology as a restoration of the pre-scientific approach. For that see Aliev 1989a: 99-101, 1990b: 157. See also Buniatov 1987a.
41. It is worth noting that, in the view of some specialists, Avesta was actually composed in the territory of Media, but there are also other conceptions (Aliev 1960: 14, 1989c: 130).
42. True, some specialists refused to treat this political establishment as a real independent state, for it was a vassal of the Iraqi Sultanate. See Topuria 1982: 190.
43. Worth noting is Aliev’s consistency with criticism of the pan-Turkic interpretations of the Azeri past, beginning in the 1950s. For example, see Aliev 1960: 50-52, 112.
44. For details of Mamedov’s pan-Turkic concept, see Mamedov 1988.
45. Meanwhile an idea of very early states seems attractive for the Azeri scholars today, and they continue “discovering” them in the territory of Azerbaijan. A western scholar popularizes their “discoveries”. See Van der Leeuw 2000: 27-28.
46. It is worth noting that this Armenian view was entirely shared by the Russian Ambassador to Armenia in 1992-1994, V. Stupishin, who, following the pre-revolutionary Russian imperial tradition, called the Azeris the “Azeri Turks” and even the “Tatars”, and scared Russia with the idea of “pan-Turkism” (Stupishin 1998: 17-18 ff.).
47. For a sharp criticism of and striking arguments against this approach, see Akopian 1987:

- 227-236; Svazian 1991: 10.
48. For his Armenian genealogy, see Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 184; Mnatsakanian 1969: 61; Ulubabian 1988: 88.
 49. For a criticism, see Svazian 1989a: 54.
 50. Yet, Heydar Aliiev denied any ethnic tensions in the NKAR in the 1970s. For that, see Karaulov 1990: 250-251.
 51. Ulubabian (1981a) has recorded more than 180 Armenian inscriptions from the 10th – 13th centuries there. It seems like Geiushev (1984: 126) was the only Azeri scholar who recognized that there were many Armenian inscriptions in Gandzasar, but he still believed that the monastery was built and run by the Albanians.
 52. For a criticism of this trend, see Svazian 1991: 16-17.
 53. For the compiled nature of the manuscript in question, see Abegian 1948: 390-391; Mnatsakanian 1969: 86-87; Akopian 1987: 177-226. For a confirmation of the Armenian nature of the original manuscript by an independent scholar, see Thomson 1997: 230.
 54. Her next book met the same reaction. For example, see Arutiunian 1987.
 55. For the Georgian-Azeri dispute over the borderlands, see Muskhelishvili 1982; Muskhelishvili, Arveladze 1988: 140-141; Mamedova 1986: 127-143, 1987: 20-35; Velikhanova 1987: 63-66; Papuashvili 1987; Geibullaev 1989.
 56. For criticism of this approach, see Akopian 1987: 28-30.
 57. This particular paragraph was written by the well-known Armenian historian, Paruyr Muradian, and edited by someone else. Indeed, Muradian himself manifested a more careful approach. Cf. Galoian, Khudaverdian 1988: 10; Muradian 1990: 77-78.
 58. For the Armenian point of view expressed in Western literature, see Walker 1991: 73-90; Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994: 51-108.
 59. For a criticism of her concept, see Novosel'tsev 1991: 199-200.
 60. Erroneously, Altstadt (1992: 195) had confused him with the well-known human rights activist, the late academician Andrei D. Sakharov.
 61. The same irony had been expressed by Muradian towards the Azeri revisionists. See Muradian 1990: 118.
 62. It is worth recalling that, according to the Armenian authors, genuine historical Albania lay on the left of the Kura River before A.D. 428; it was permanently occupied by Roman garrisons, and its rulers were Roman protégés. There was no question of any political independence. For that, see Svazian 1989a: 54; Muradian 1990: 150.
 63. In fact, Griboedov had nothing to do with this document. See Muradian 1990: 144.
 64. For Velichko's activities, see Suny 1981: 131-132; Muradian 1990: 103.
 65. This was noted by another reviewer of the Neimatova's book. See Bol'shakov 1985.
 66. Also cf. Akhundov 1986: 247 for the Azeri view, and Ulubabian 1988: 87 for the Armenian view.
 67. They are well represented in Suren Aivazian's book. See Aivazian 1997.
 68. Since the very late 1990s, the fact of the Armenian genocide in 1915 has received an international recognition. First, the Belgian Senate passed an Armenian genocide resolution in 1998, and in January 2001, the French parliament followed. Then, in April the New York Life Insurance Co. agreed to pay compensation to heirs of the victims. In response, Turkish Islamic activists accused France of genocide carried on during the Algeria's war of independence, and Turkey cancelled an array of contracts with French firms.

Part II The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict

1. For different interpretations of their intentions, see Menteshashvili 1990: 7-10; Lakoba 2001a.
2. For him see Basaria 1984: 3-24. For the Congress, see Clogg 1995: 181.
3. Abkhazia was represented in the Union of the North Caucasian Mountain Dwellers by the "minister plenipotentiary of the Abkhazian affairs", S. M. Ashkhatsava.
4. For details of this document, see Lakoba 1993: 294-296; 2001a.
5. Even contemporary Georgian authors, who are by no means sympathetic towards the Abkhazians, acknowledge that the Georgian Men'sheviks ignored the national authenticity of the Abkhazians. See Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 68.
6. This event is interpreted quite differently by Georgian historians, who related the changes within the APS to the planned reorganization, intended to make its composition accord with the ethnic composition of the Abkhazian population. See Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 83-84.
7. For the Georgian and Abkhazian versions of these events, see Menteshashvili 1990: 11-19; Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 84; Lakoba 1990a: 64-69. Also see Hewitt 1993: 278-281.
8. The Georgian Church had made great efforts to be active in Abkhazia in earlier times as well, however. For that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 21.
9. Zviad Gamsakhurdia and other Georgian politicians argued in the early 1990s that the rights of ethnic minorities were not violated in the Democratic Republic of Georgia, and that that was rather the result of the establishment of three autonomous bodies in Georgia after 1921. For example, see Akhalkatsi, Alashvili 1991; Khoshtaria-Brosse 1991a.
10. For KGB documents testifying to the deliberate resettlement of the Mingrelians in Abkhazia and to the policy of Georgianization of the Abkhazians, as well as Abkhazian resistance to it, see Clogg 1995.
11. S. Ashkhatsava had already been arrested in 1937, with another group of Abkhazian intellectuals, including his critics, Z. Agrba and A. Khashba. See Clogg 1995: 181, 183, 186.
12. As late as 1989, Gamsakhurdia still denied this fact. For that, see Marykhuba 1994b: 51-53.
13. During recent years, some Georgian authors have begun to acknowledge ethnocide in Abkhazia during the period in question. For example, see Nodia 1998: 23.
14. Sh. D. Inal-Ipa was the fourth participant of the movement, but his signature was absent for security reasons.
15. The figures referred to by L. V. Marshania are slightly different. See Marshania 1995: 188-190.
16. For him, see Delba 1937; Gulia 1962; Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965; Inal-Ipa 1974.
17. Gulia was by no means fascinated by this task, and they knew this even at the KGB. See Clogg 1995: 185.
18. For Inal-Ipa's more critical remarks, see Inal-Ipa 1965: 16; 1976: 40-42. Also see Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965: 66.
19. In fact, Herodotus reproduced the widespread classical belief that Egypt was connected with Colchis by a large river named Ocean. For that, see Braund 1994: 17-18.
20. He was already the head of the "Bzyb' Committee of the Society for Abkhazian Education" in 1913. In 1918, he was the Minister plenipotentiary of Abkhazian affairs at the Union of the North Caucasian Mountain-Dwellers. For that, see Bgazhba 1964: 312; Bgazhba, Zelinsky 1965: 56; Clogg 1995: 181.
21. In fact, the first churches were built in Abkhazia in the 4th – 6th centuries A.D. See Gulia 1925: 136 ff.; Fadeev 1934: 69; Inal-Ipa 1965: 113-114, 124.

22. For a criticism of the approach, see Inal-Ipa 1976: 39-40.
23. Later on, this formula was appreciated so much by Abkhazian historians that they could not stop citing it in their works. For example, see Ashkhatsava 1925: 22; Fadeev 1934: 85; Maryhuba 1993: 20-21.
24. Contemporary specialists confirm that Moschi, Macrones, Mossynoeci, Tibareni and Saspirei might be identified with proto-Georgian groups. See Diakonov 1968: 119-122; Redgate 1998: 51, 57-58.
25. For more careful criticism of the Dzhevakhishvili's non-Marxist views, see Melikishvili 1959: 9, 13; Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 32.
26. According to recent discoveries, they were Indo-European in language. See Khazaradze 1978. Yet, Khazaradze is inclined to identify the Mushki with the Kartvelians. See Khazaradze 1984.
27. A study of the Samtavro graveyard dating from the end of the 2nd – early 1st Millennia B.C. has demonstrated that in those days the inhabitants of Kartli were similar in physical appearance to the Caucasian highlanders, and southern physical elements arrived there later on. See Melikishvili 1959: 118-119.
28. For the sympathy of the contemporary Georgian scholarship towards this approach, see Melikishvili 1986: 56. In fact, there are more reasons to identify the Tubal with Luwian-speakers, and the Mushki with the Phrygian-speakers. For that, see Diakonov 1968: 193-194.
29. Yet, the tendency to regard Abkhazian as a dialect of Georgian had already emerged in Georgian scholarship in the late 19th century. For example, this view was shared by D. Kipiani. For that, see Hewitt 1995a: 290, 309, note 5.
30. This conclusion is very much appreciated by the contemporary Abkhazians. For example, see Chirikba 1998: 38.
31. This interpretation was based on the archaeological pattern reconstructed by the archaeologist B. A. Kuftin, who identified the Colchian culture with the Koban' one and related them to the "Iberian-Mingrelians". See Kuftin 1949: 133-257, 312.
32. Later on, most archaeologists gave up the indiscriminate identification of the Koban' culture of the Central Caucasus with the Colchian culture. For that, see Anchabadze 1964: 83-84; Kozenkova 1996: 130-131.
33. This idea was obviously rooted in Marr's heritage. See Marr 1927a: 13-14.
34. Later on, in order to defend Dzhanashia's approach from reasonable criticism, Melikishvili explained that Dzhanashia was indicating linguistic relationships between the Georgians and the North Caucasians rather than any direct physical ancestors. See Melikishvili 1959: 14.
35. Other Georgian authors were more cautious; they identified the western zone with the Colchians and the eastern one with the Iberians. See Mikeladze 1969: 7.
36. M. P. Inadze followed the same line in her Candidate in History thesis, where she even pointed to the Georgian origin of the Apsilians and the Abasgoi. See Inadze 1953: 18.
37. The Georgian historical tradition still respects Dzhanashia greatly as a cult figure. Yet, other scholars sometimes treat him as the "falsifier of history" of the Beria era. For example, see Voronov 1995.
38. For plans about territorial expansion that were reflected by the concept in question, see Suny 1988: 284-285.
39. I am thankful to Arda Inal-Ipa for the information on Inal-Ipa's participation in this matter.
40. True, in 1937 Delba published a pamphlet for the 45th anniversary of the commencement of Gulia's literary and research activities, which glorified the classic of the Abkhazian

literature.

41. Yet, in this respect Ingoroqva was not alone among Georgian historians of the early 1950s. For example, see Inadze 1953.
42. It is a pity that Western scholars sometimes reproduce this idea. For example, see Wixman 1982: 152.
43. For a criticism of Ingoroqva's methodology, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 7-8; Hewitt 1993: 273-275, 1998: 118-119.
44. For the political connotations of Ingoroqva's ideas, see Lakoba, Shamba 1989; Chumalov 1995: 23-25, 84-85.
45. Dzhanashia had identified the western region with the Colchians, whom his Georgian followers viewed as Western Kartvelian tribes. For that, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 37-38, note 11.
46. Melikishvili stuck to this approach all his life. See Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 31-32, 180, 184.
47. Later on, he gave up this idea. See Melikishvili, Lordkipanidze 1989: 181.
48. Contemporary scholars view this matter quite differently. For example, see Redgate 1998: 5.
49. The Abkhazian ethnographer, Sh. D. Inal-Ipa, believed that the country of Diauekhi was populated by Hurrians. See Inal-Ipa 1976: 110.
50. It is worth noting that the contemporary Laz, who live in Turkey, feel that they have no special relationships with the Mingrelians. They are more inclined to associate themselves with Turkey and Islam. The same was discovered by D. Bakradze in the case of the Ajars, who also identified themselves with Islam and the "Tatars" and were rapidly shifting to Turkish. See Bakradze 1878: 45-46, 76-77; Hann 1997, 2000; Hann, Beller-Hann 1998: 258.
51. Melikishvili's approach is sometimes shared by Western authors. For example, see Redgate 1998: 57; Goldenberg 1994: 13, where the "Kashki" are identified with the Georgians.
52. For the Armenian view, see Manandian 1956; Yeremian 1970; Karagezian 1981. For relationships between the early Mushki and Armenians, see Diakonov 1983: 169-170; Redgate 1998: 16-17.
53. This idea proved to hold firm in Georgian historiography. For example, see Mikeladze 1974: 191.
54. The archaeological excavations in Mtskheta were considered so important that they were patronized by the CC CPG and the Soviet of Ministers of the Georgian SSR starting in 1974. For a recent overview of all these discoveries, see Lordkipanidze 1982: 24-26; Braund 1994: 206-208.
55. In fact, first, the Greek alphabet was even more popular there in the period in question, and secondly, "Armazean writing" was discovered in Armenia as well, where Mesrob Mashtots came from. See Braund 1994: 212-215.
56. Much earlier, D. Bakradze also assumed that the Georgian alphabet had pre-Christian roots. See Bakradze 1878: VII.
57. In fact, as we will see further on, this occurred only in the 10th century.
58. For criticism of this approach by Abkhazian scholars, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 9-10; Marykhuba 1994a: 210-211.
59. Later on, Georgian authors represented Qulhai as the first Georgian Kingdom in the east Black Sea region. For example, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 48-50.
60. Later on, this view was enthusiastically developed by other Georgian authors. For example, see Beradze 1989: 34.

61. For a criticism of this approach, see Lordkipanidze 1979a: 68, note 117; Braund 1994: 90-91.
62. For criticism of this approach, see Novosel'tsev 1985: 88; Boltunova 1979a; Yailenko 1982: 247-258; Lakoba 1993: 36-37; Tsetskhladze 1997, 1998; Braund 1994: 87-89, 91-92; Kohl, Tsetskhladze 1995: 164-168.
63. Yet, even some Georgian scholars recognized that Lordkipanidze went too far in arguing this. For example, see Inadze 1968: 144-145.
64. For a criticism of this approach, see Tsetskhladze 1997: 105-106.
65. Earlier, Kuftin wrote of a representation of the local Mother Goddess on the "colchidki". See Kuftin 1949: 255. Yet, this image was a common feature of the Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. See Tsetskhladze 1997: 104.
66. For an overview, see Braund 1994: 96-121; Tsetskhladze 1997, 1998.
67. The same concept was represented in the first Abkhazian school textbook in local history. See Dzidzaria 1960: 12-19, 34-35.
68. In fact, initially the Misimianoi might be identified with the Svans. See Tsulaia 1995: 20-21.
69. For the Tsebel'da culture, see also Pachulia 1968: 50-51; 1976: 118-120.
70. Besides, Inal-Ipa found Abkhazian place names in the northwest Caucasus up as far as Tuapse. See Inal-Ipa 1976: 383.
71. It is worth noting that he was more cautious in earlier times, when he assumed that the Abkhazian-Adyghe and west Georgian peoples were able to form in the same sub-stratum. See, for example, Inal-Ipa 1964: 4.
72. As we already know, Armenian scholars identified the Hayasa population with the Armenian ancestors.
73. It is worth noting that, by contrast, Anchabadze permanently ignored Turchaninov's view.
74. At the same time, Inal-Ipa's use of place names was sometimes incorrect. This was pointed out by his Georgian opponents. For example, see Lomouri 1990: 171-172.
75. Only in the very late 1980s, did Inal-Ipa venture to write of what was impossible to mention in the 1960s – 1970s. He discussed the "Abkhazian school of Christian architecture", the great impact of Abkhazian upon the Georgian language, etc. See Inal-Ipa 1989b; Inal-Ipa, Amichba 1989.
76. It is worth noting that Ardzinba's last name means "gold-worker" in Abkhazian. Apparently, he was born to a prestigious lineage of Abkhazian smiths.
77. There is one more, in this case an Afrocentric, hypothesis of Colchian origins, which, following Herodotus, claimed that they were Black Africans. See Ali, Ali 1993: 19; Martin 1993: 63. Characteristically, while sharing the Georgian concept of "dual aboriginality", S. Chervonnaya cannot but acknowledge the Abkhazian indigenus status. See Chervonnaya 1994: 9-21.
78. For arguments in favor of the Abkhazian approach, see Hewitt 1993: 272.
79. In fact, Yenukidze had just reproduced the resolution of the CC CPG, passed in April 1979. See Marykhuba 1994a: 281, 284. Quite recently, R. Chabukiani (1995: 29) reproduced the same reasoning.
80. He returned to this argument many times while appearing in the Georgian media. For example, see Muskhelishvili 1990: 18, 1991.
81. For racism in contemporary Georgia, see Charachidze 1989: 13; Hewitt 1993: 300, 320, note 83.
82. For censorship and the impact of Party officials upon the Georgian media, see Chkheidze 1989.

83. For the secret protocol of this meeting, see Marykhuba 1994a: 298-330.
84. For that incident, see Marykhuba 1994a: 168, 189-205.
85. For that, see Hewitt 1996: 210.
86. This entirely contradicted contemporary academic views. For the latter, see Shnirelman 1989b.
87. The historian, Akaki Bakradze, a professor at Tbilisi University, was persecuted in the very late 1970s, when he was accused of fostering propaganda for Georgian nationalism. Between March 1989 and May 1990, he was the head of the All-Georgian Shota Rustaveli Society. See Goldenberg 1994: 92, 95.
88. For Voronov's response, see Voronov 1990. For Inal-Ipa's criticism of Mibchuan's view, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 20-21.
89. For the fate of Mingrelian, see Hewitt 1995a. Interestingly, recently S. Chervonnaya reproduced an idea of the Iberian-Caucasian language family as a well-established theory. See Chervonnaya 1994: 9-10.
90. Thus, it is difficult to agree with K. Dzebisashvili that the Georgian mass media were loyal to the Abkhazians until 1992. See Dzebisashvili 2000: 153. It is also worth noting that, while referring to a hot Georgian-Abkhazian historiographic dispute and sharing Georgian views of the past, Chervonnaya mentioned Georgian chauvinist propaganda only in passing. See Chervonnaya 1994: 55-56.
91. For the events of 1989, see Istinu upriatat' nel'sia 1989.
92. For other examples of this kind of propaganda that involved many Georgian intellectuals, and for the Abkhazian response, see Tsvinaria 1989; Chalidze 1991; Kvarchia, Achugba 1991: 141; Inal-Ipa 1989b, 1992: 27; Hewitt 1998: 120, 123.
93. It is worth noting that, while discussing geographical issues of classical Colchis thirty years earlier, Lomouri avoided addressing hot ethnic problems. See Lomouri 1957.
94. This was reported by a Moscow journalist who visited Abkhazia in the beginning of 1991. See Arseniev 1991.
95. One should appreciate that she had defended these ideas persistently from the 1960s – 1970s. For that, see Marykhuba 1994a: 200.
96. For a criticism of this approach, see Hewitt 1998: 122. See also Shnirelman 1998a: 55.
97. For a criticism of this approach from the philological point, see Inal-Ipa 1992: 108, note 50; Hewitt 1998: 121. For an indignant response by a certain Abkhazian scholar, see Ashkharua 1993.
98. It is worth noting that the author was a retired major-general in the KGB.
99. In fact, quite the opposite was the case, as it is acknowledged even by Gamakharia and Gogia, who share the Georgiocentric stance. See Gamakharia, Gogia 1997: 49-50.
100. It is no accident that, at that time, the Abkhazians accused him of being incompetent in the Abkhazian language. See Marykhuba 1994a: 176.
101. Even earlier, Marshania attempted to ease the escalating Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. He warned the Georgian authorities to avoid intervention in Abkhazian affairs, and in this respect, his position was different from the Georgian one from the very beginning. See Marshania 1990.
102. One of the authors of the volume, an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and History of Georgia at the Georgian Institute of Agriculture, D. Gamakharia, took part in the dissemination of Ingoroqva-type viewpoint as early as 1991. See Gamakharia, Chania 1991a. It is also worth noting that he was a Gamsakhurdia follower and a member of the Georgian faction in the Abkhazian parliament between December 1991 and August 1992.

103. This author reproduced Turchaninov's hypothesis about the relationship between the Maikop Stone and the Byblos writing system, although he skipped references to either Turchaninov or the connections with the Abkhazian language. Apparently, being a professional linguist, he was aware of the highly doubtful nature of Turchaninov's ideas.
104. Yet, one Abkhazian author insists that initially they used Abkhazian in the liturgy in Abkhazian Churches. See Smyr 1994: 8.
105. Indeed, initially the Abkhazian Kingdom was established as a sovereign power by the Abkhazian Princes, but later their independence was restricted by the newly created Georgian state. For an illuminating discussion, see Tsulaia 1995: 30-41.
106. For the "genocide of the Abkhazian people" over the last hundred years, see also Shamba 1990.
107. For the importance of the origin of iron production in the context of the Georgian-Abkhazian discourse of the past, see Shnirelman 1998a: 53-54.
108. This was an exaggeration, for the relationships between the Greeks and the local inhabitants in northern Colchis were by no means peaceful. Only the Dioscurias region was greatly affected by Hellenization, whereas the highlands were beyond the sphere of Greek influence. See Tsatskhladze 1997: 108, 1998: 93.
109. In his scholarly papers Lakoba is more careful with respect to remote language relationships. See Lakoba 2000: 17.
110. For details of the development of writing systems in the territory of Abkhazia, see Bgazhba 1967: 6-25.
111. For the anti-Muslim stance of the well-known Georgian writer, Ch. Amiredzhibi, see Temishev 1990. Later on, he claimed that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict lacked any religious connotations, yet kept linking the Abkhazians with Jordan and Saudi Arabia. See Amiredzhibi 1992.
112. The term "Samurzaqano tribe" was first used at the time of Nicholas I. See Basaria 1923: 99.
113. Meanwhile, the situation looked different in the late 19th century. At that time, the Russian authorities made a clear distinction between the Samurzaqano people and the Mingrelians, whereas it proved more difficult for them to distinguish between the Samurzakano people and the Abkhazians. See Muller 1998: 224.
114. Intentional ignorance of this census by Georgian demographers is clear to any independent researcher. For example, see Muller 1998: 225.
115. Also, the Russians had no ambitions to view themselves as indigenous people in Abkhazia.
116. The historian, Stanislav Lakoba, took part in the development of this symbolism.
117. The Abkhazian historian recently confirmed this. See Lakoba 2000: 18.

Part III Thrown over the Ridge

1. For the establishment of the SOAR in detail, see Shengelaia 1991: 45-73; Toidze 1994.
2. True, Chochiev himself maintained that the letter was written by Z. Tskhovrebov. See Chochiev n.d.: 22, 27.
3. An English expert shares this view as well. See Birch 1996: 170.
4. They claimed this despite the fact that there were twice as many Jews and Armenians combined than there were Georgians in Tskhinvali in 1886.
5. It is worth noting that the contemporary Ossetians are turning away from Vaneev's beliefs. As was demonstrated by a sociological survey among Vladikavkaz bilingual school children, who proved to be equally fluent in both Russian and Ossetian, they manifested

their ethnicity with reference to norms of behavior, ethnic festivals and rituals rather than to language loyalty. See Kibizova 1994.

6. For the political struggle around the Koban' culture, see Shnirelman 1996b.
7. A more plausible hypothesis identifies the KAC with the Dvals. See Kuznetsov 1992: 184.
8. In fact, whereas there are good reasons to identify it with the Hurrians, evidence in favor of the Kartvelians is lacking.
9. Chochiev discovers the associations with Ossetian folklore there, no less successfully. See Chochiev 1996.
10. The leading specialist in Alan archaeology considers this to be a powerful argument, which, together with some other archaeological data, provides a strong basis for the idea of the Alans-Ossetians' arrival in the Bolshaja Liakhvi River Basin as early as the 5th – 6th centuries. See Kuznetsov 1989, 1992: 177, 180-183.
11. For these threats by President Gamsakhurdia, see Cheremin 1991; Birch 1996: 166.
12. Being familiar with Chochiev, it is not easy to judge what is more characteristic – sincere pride in the ancestors or open mockery. Indeed, in the same pamphlet, Chochiev said: “Do not believe myths of a chosen people”, and, at the same time, did his best to construct the “all-Ossetian idea”. See Chochiev n.d.: 23, 71 ff..
13. For dramatic events linked with this invention, see Chochiev n.d.: 29-30.
14. This is a common strategy of ethnic minorities claiming the upgrading of their political status. See Horowitz 1985: 33.

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